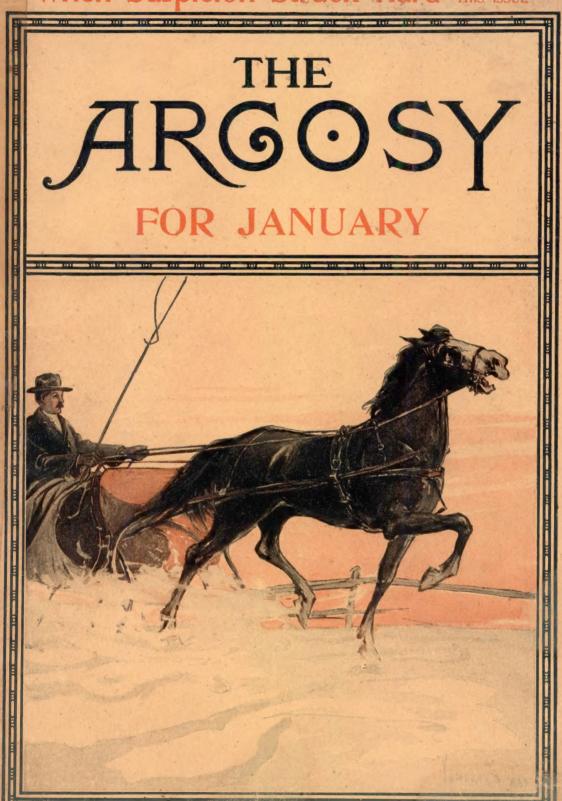
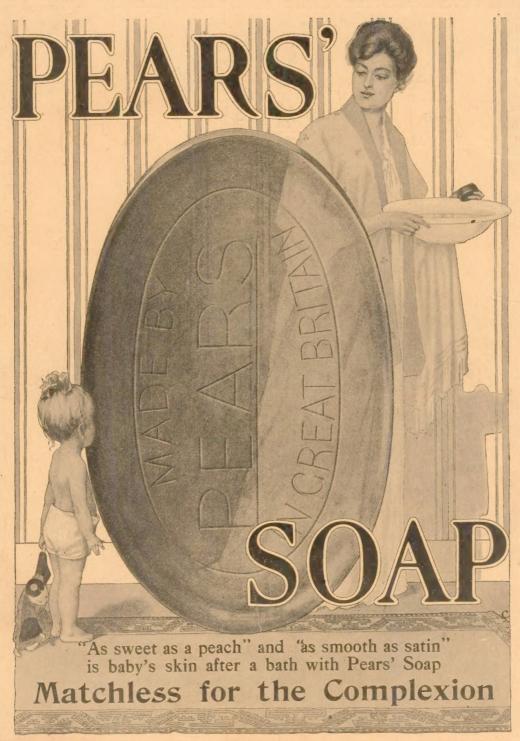
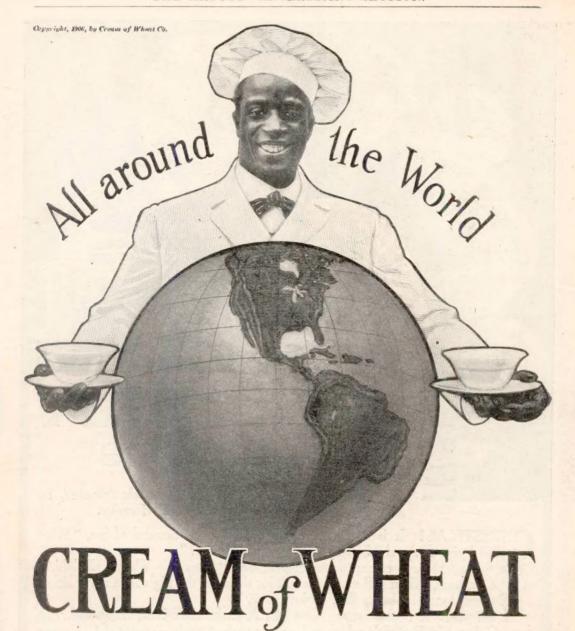
# When Suspicion Struck Hard BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE



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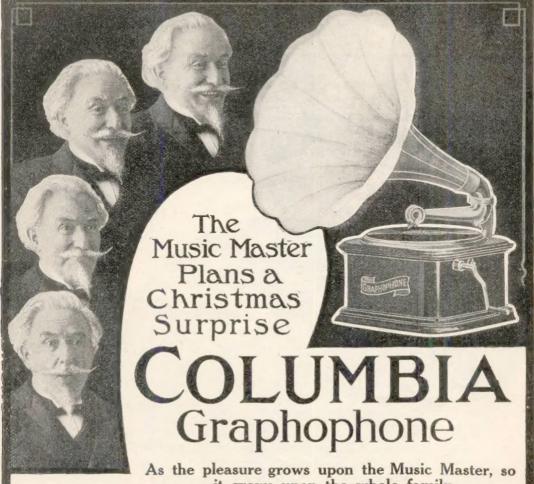


OF ALL SCENTED SOAPS PEARS' OTTO OF ROSE IS THE BEST. "All rights secured."



Always the same wherever you get it—pure, delicious wholesome, satisfying.

The food of nations, And the Nation's food.



it grows upon the whole family.

"HRISTMAS! It is in the air. My friends, they demand of me, "What shall I give to the children for the fete of Christmas?"

On the instant there comes to me the great idea, "Attend! We are all children at the Christmas. You will make one gift for them all, the big ones and the little."

"One gift for all! Impossible. How then?"

"I tell you. It is this way: One gift, A Columbia Graphophone, with those Columbia Records which make the so perfect music, - songs of Christmas, of the Opera, of the Vaudeville, - music of all instruments. Stories that make the entertainment, the drollery. Me! I laugh with pleasure at the thought. It is an idea of the greatest — One gift for the whole family — The Columbia Graphophone."

If you have no talking machine buy a Columbia, if you have another make, buy Columbia Records.

We don't ask you to pay cash for your Holiday purchases. Buy your Columbia outfit from any dealer or
at our stores in all the large cities and pay when the burdens of your Christmas expenses are past.

# COLUMBIA PHONOGRAPH COMPANY, Gen'l 353 Broadway, New York.

Grand Prix Paris 1900

Double Grand Prize St. Louis 1904

Grand Prize Milan 1906







346

# The Argosy for January

# One Complete Novel

IN THE DEPTHS OF DISASTER. The story of a pursuit which was transformed into a captivity, and which brought its victims into fear-some waters.

..MARVIN DAN

# Six Serial Stories

WHEN SUSPICION STRUCK HARD. Part I. A victim of circumstantial evidence, and his thrilling adventures in his pursuit of the man he felt to be really guilty..... .....STEPHEN BRANDISH DOWN AND OUT. Part II. The appalling consequences of a misunderstanding in the matter of table-legs; being the tale of an unhappy aspirant to high living.....LAWRENCE G. BYRD 252 THE EIGHTH WONDER. Part III. An attempt to displace the keystone 274 followed by a discovery that electrified......BERTRAM LEBHAR 311 THAT LITTLE LOCKED CASE. Part IV. Certain extraordinary experiences that fell to the lot of a business man in connection with an article he had never seen, but which he was credited with pos-330 ......CROMWELL KNOX THE SCARLET SCARAB. Part V. A story of Naples up to date in which an American gets on the track of romance by accident and is

# Twelve Short Stories

thereafter made to dance to a dangerous tune...ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

AN EXPENSIVE BOARDER	C. LANGTON CLARKE	220
BY THE SECRET DOOR	MARY IMLAY TAYLOR	246
THE MAN ON THE BENCH		
STRANGELY ENTANGLED		
A DEAL IN SUBURBAN	G. HERB PALIN	327
RUNNING WILD	W. HANSON DURHAM	342
A DOUBLE DECEPTION		
THE BEAT OF THE TEMPEST		
HOME, SWEET HOME		
THE LETTERS MARKED XX	EDGAR FRANKLIN	372
FOUNDED ON FICTION	SEWARD W. HOPKINS	380
MUTUAL FLAMES	TOM WORTH	383



# "THE EAGLE OF EMPIRE"



"IN THE MOUTH OF THE GIFT-HORSE"

are the two widely contrasting but thoroughly interesting serials to start in the Fetruary ARGOSY.

ISSUED MONTHLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,

175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK,



# Pabst Extract Calendar for 1907

This charming panel shows in richest coloring the vivacious health and beauty of the women who achieve and maintain physical perfection by the aid of

# Pabst Extract

For those who are run down, fagged-out, overworked, nervous, anæmic and languid, Pabst Extract, rich in the food extractives of malt and the tonic properties of hops, is not only The "Best" Tonic, but a healthy, wholesome food, giving strength and vitality to the entire system.

This handsome art calendar, size  $7\frac{1}{2}x36$  inches, is exquisitely printed in seventeen colors and is a striking example of Bryson's best style in portraying the American Girl. It is free from advertising and makes a most charming decoration for the library, den or office.

The calendar will be sent, postpaid, to any address upon receipt of 10c in coin or stamps. Address

Pabst Extract, Dept. E, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



# The Salary (\$) uestion

All recognized advertising authorities and publishers will tell you that the demand for competent ad men and women is wonderfully in excess of the supply.

All of them in a position to know what's what will tell you that the Powell System of Advertising Instruction by correspondence towers mountains higher than all other methods combined.

\$\\\ \frac{5000}{\$|20000}\\ \tau \\ \frac{to}{\$600000}\\ \tau \\ \tau

A RE you facing the salary question and wondering whether it will pay you to become a proficient advertising writer?

Most young men and women sooner or later do a lot of thinking on this important matter, and the same is true of many older people who see the years glide by without being able to make any material

to make any material gain or advancement.

I do considerable advertising at times to interest the right sort of people in the almost boundless possibilities awaiting trained ad writers, because the demand for their services is growing at a tremendous rate. Among the host of applications for Powell graduates is the following, which shows that this great call comes not merely from the large cities, but from every section from coast to coast.

Nov. 9, 1906:

"The writer is interested in forty-five retail stores in Montana, Washington, Oregon and Idaho, and while we do not employ an ad man in every store, at the same time we are always in the market for half a dozen good men, and if you have any graduates who are looking for a position kindly

have them correspond with me."

Mr. Spencer E. Carr, Spokane, Wash., writes

The Powell System of Advertising Instruction by correspondence, will thoroughly qualify anyone possessed of a common school education, plus determination, to fill ready positions from \$1200.00 up. It is the only System endorsed by leading experts, advertising editors and great publishers and the only one able to publish a continuous stream of genuine, recent testimonials from graduates now in high positions.

Advertising agencies and advertisers eagerly seek Powell graduates, and so specify in their want ads, because they know my personal training is the only one in existence that gives actual, practical experience, instead of mere theory and trash.

If you want to learn all about the situation, let me mail you free, my two explanatory books—Prospectus and "Net Results," the finest examples ever published. Just address me

George H. Powell, 265 Metropolitan Annex, N. V.



ERNEST NEWKIRK, Adv. Mgr., Hamilton's Largest Department Slore.

Mr. Newkirk became advertising manager of the largest department store in Hamilton, Ont., four months after becoming my student. From a long letter of praise I extract a few words: "It seems hardly credible that four months ago I knew nothing of advertising, and in that short time you have fitted me to fill the position I now occupy. Your course has certainly worked wonders—doubled my salary and put me in a more congenial position."



# NILES BRYANT SCHOOL.

# GOOD PIANO TUNERS Earn \$5 to \$15 per day.

We can teach you quickly BY MAIL. The new scientific Tune-a-Phone method endorsed by highest authorities. Knowledge of music not necessary. Write for free booklet. 60 Music Hall, Battle Creek, Mich.



# Make Money ORIENTAL TALES and ARABIAN NIGHTS

The complete, literally translated de luxe edition [very rare]. Privately printed in London. Strictly limited to 1000 registered and numbered sets. Containing all the famous Laluze and also all the Letchford full page illustrations. Most gorgeous and beautiful buckram cloth, paper titles, gilt tops. Only 9 sets at just One-Third the regular price. Biggest Book Bargam yet offered. Write at once. Catagilt tops. Only Biggest Book

HARCOURT BINDERY, 427 Fifth Ave., N. Y. City.

# Write tor our free Illustrated Rook How to Become an Electrical Engineer, Mechanical or Steam Engineer. We back Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Steam Engineering, Steam Engineering, Electric Indiway, Mechanical Drawing, at your home by mall. Institute endorsed by Thos. A. Edition and others. ELECTRICAL

ENGINEER INSTITUTE, Dept. U, 240 A W. 22d St., New York,



# I Teach Sign Painting

SHOW-CARD Writing or Lettering by mall and guarantee success. Only field not over-crowded. My instruction is unequaled because practical, personal and thorough. Easy terms. Write for large catalogue. Chas. J. Strovo, Pres.

DETROIT SCHOOL OF LETTERING.

Dept. 36, Detroit, Mich " Oldest and Largest School of Its Kind.

POEMS WANTED

also Musical Compositions. We pay Royalty, Publish and Popularize. We compose and arrange music Free of charge. Established 1863. Send us your work.

CEO. JABERG MUSIC CO.

248 W. 7TH STREET

CINCINNATI, O.

The original school, Instruction by mail adapted to every one, Recognized by courts and educators. Experienced and competent instructors. Takes spare time only. Three courses—Preparatory, Business, College. Prepares for practice. Will better your condition and prospects in business. Students and graduates everywhere. Full particulars and special offer free.

The Sprague
Correspondence School
of Law,
480 Majestic Bidg, Detroit, Mich. The U.S. Government has thousands of steady

The U.S. Government has thousands of steady positions paying good salaries, for those who can pass the Civil Service examinations. We can fit you, at a small cost, to pass these can fit you, at a small cost, to pass these can fit you at a small cost, to pass these can fit you for a good place. It is necessary only that you be an American and over 18 years of age. Write at once for free Civil Service Booklet.

International Correspondence Schools, Box 806 C, Scranton, Pa



# ecome

Every woman should prepare herself for the emergencies of life and nursing is woman's most natural and ennobling calling. Our system of training (by mail) is recognized by physicians and hospitals throughout the country as being thoroughly practical. We guarantee our graduates employment at good wages.

WE ARE THE PIONEER NURSES' CORRESPONDENCE TRAINING SCHOOL OF AMERICA

All others have followed after us, but none have ever approached our efficiency. Our faculty is of the highest standard. Write to any of our hundreds of graduates (we will send you names and addresses for the asking), and you will find them not only willing to answer your inquiries, but eager and enthusiastic in their endorsement of our methods in every particular. Write us to-day, and we will send you handsome illustrated booklet giving you valuable suggestions and information. Address

AMERICAN TRAINING SCHOOL FOR NURSES 1013 Crilly Building, Chicago, Ill.

# Earn from \$25.00 to \$100.00 a week

Some of our students were \$10-\$12-and \$15 a week men in various lines of business-stenographers, clerks, bookkeepers, salesmen, etc. They greatly increased their salaries and many of them outstripped even our high expectations by jumping into the ranks of \$10,000.00 men in less than a year after graduating.

Some of our students were what you might call big-salaried men when they enrolled-already in the \$10,000.00 a year class; but a knowledge of advertising made it possible for them to double and treble their incomes. The amount of your present income has nothing to do with the value of our instruction to you.

It all depends upon the use you will make of our training. Advertisement writers make from \$25.00 to \$100.00 a week AND THE KNOWLEDGE WILL INCREASE ANY MAN'S ABILITY 25% to 100%.

Mr. C. L. Buschmann, of Indianapolis, had a minor interest in

a small factory; our course of training showed him how he might turn this small interest into a large one. He used his advertising knowledge to such good effect that he was able to reorganize with a capital stock of \$75,000.00 and is now Vice-President and Manager of the firm, which is doing a tremendous business.

A country school teacher out in Washington,-Mr. A. W. Armstrong,-made up his mind to benefit by our instructions, and he is now Advertising Manager for the McCarthy Dry Goods Co., of Seattle, on \$1800.00 a year.

A drug clerk in the obscure little town of Del Monte, Cal., -Mr. Everet T. Mateer, -chose to make something of himself, studied with us, and less than a year later, went flying to New York to accept a splendid position with the M. P. Gould Co.—another \$1800.00 a year

A window trimmer in Fond du Lac, Wisc., -Mr. J. W. Fisk, -decided he ought to be worth more than \$75 a month to his firm-his salary as a window trimmer-took our course, and is now their efficient Advertising Manager,

and in the \$1800.00 a year class.

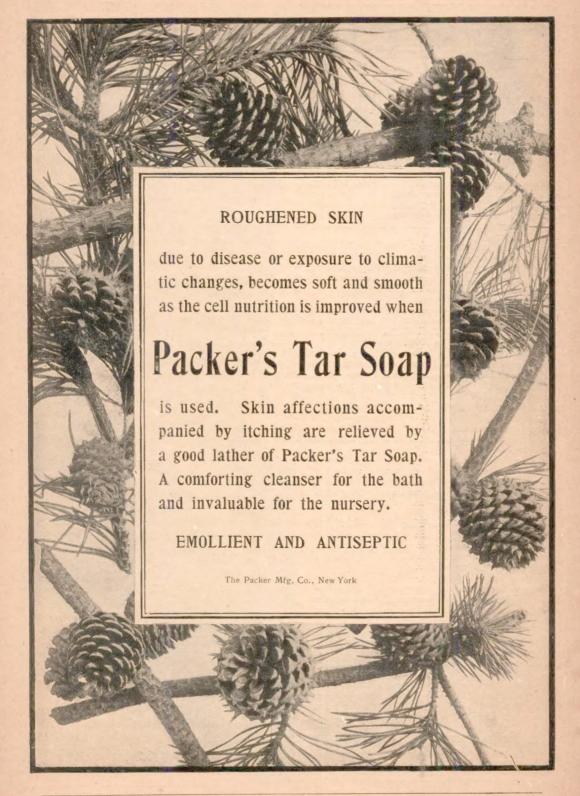
A young farmer in Michigan, -Mr. C. V. R. Fullenwider, -made up his mind to improve on his \$1.50 a-dayand-board record, studied this course all winter and the next fall secured a splendid position as Advertising Manager with a large furniture store in Grand Rapids, Mich.

It isn't necessary to go on listing these successes indefinitely-if you are interested in bettering your financial condition, you will WRITE FOR OUR LARGE, HANDSOME PROSPECTUS, which tells all about our students' rapid advancement, and which lays the whole advertising field plainly and interestingly before you. TAUGHT BY MAIL in your spare hours. Write while the subject is fresh in your mind.

# Page-Davis Company

Address (90 Wabash Avenue, CHICAGO Either Office 150 Nassau Street, NEW YORK





# IN THE DEPTHS OF DISASTER.

BY MARVIN DANA.

The story of a pursuit which was transformed into a captivity, and which brought its victims into fearsome waters.

(Complete in This Issue.)

# CHAPTER I.

HELPLESS IN SIGHT OF TRAGEDY.

"DO you see the money coming?"
"Not yet," Billy answered.
"There's nothing moving in sight."

My brother was standing on the brim of a four-thousand-foot precipice, gazing through a telescope down into the valley below. I sat at ease beside him.

"Then Uncle Charles is late," I continued. "Jove though, it's a joy to have a hundred and fifty thousand dollars swinging along toward us. Eh?"

"Rather! Especially when a few months ago we didn't have fifteen thousand cents between the two of us. Uncle Charles is a trump."

"He is, indeed," I agreed enthusiastically. "I wish he would loom in sight."

Only a short time before this same uncle, Charles Carnight, had sent to us, the children of his dead brother, in New York, asking us to join him on his coffee plantation in Mexico. There he had informed us that he intended not merely to make us his heirs but to give us at once some share in his wealth.

Part of this was the plantation, but the greater portion was in two mines which he had acquired. One he had already sold for fifty thousand dollars. To-day he had ridden to Cheros, the nearest town, to complete the sale of the other and to receive the purchase money, one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. One can imagine the delight with which we had experienced this change from poverty to wealth, and our grateful love for our uncle knew no bounds.

We had ridden part of the way toward Cheros with him, and then turned aside to climb Buona, an outlying spur of the mountains. We wished to make some examination of the timber, as the mountain was our uncle's property, and, also, we had a fancy to scale the highest cliffs, for the sake of the magnificent view.

It was to that end we had brought the telescope with which Billy now sur-

veyed the trail.

"Ah," Billy exclaimed a moment later, "there's something coming in sight to the south! It must be uncle. Yes, it's somebody on horseback. Coming at a good pace, too."

"Let me look," and I reached out my

hand.

Billy passed me the telescope, and I adjusted the glass to my eye.

Yes, the horseman was now to be seen clearly, cantering along the trail that ran like a silver ribbon across the valley. Momentarily the form grew more distinct.

"Yes, yes," I cried, "it's Uncle Charles. I can recognize him now."

"And he's bringing us a hundred and fifty thousand dollars," my brother said exultingly. "He said he was going to divide it between us at once, Jack."

"Yes," I agreed. "It seems a good deal of money, my boy."

At Billy's request I gave the telescope back to him. The horseman was now in the middle of the valley, directly opposite us. I could see him well enough even without the glass.

"Why, there's somebody else!" Billy

exclaimed suddenly.

"Where?" I asked, astonished.

I had scanned the whole stretch of the trail and had seen only the solitary

"Not in the road," was my brother's answer. "He has just ridden out of the woods on the other side of the trail. He's behind uncle. And he hasn't gone into the road—he's riding alongside it, on the turf."

"That's curious," I muttered.

I thought I could distinguish the moving form dimly against the shadows of the wood, but'I was not satisfied.

"Let me look," I urged.

Billy yielded the telescope reluctantly. "I don't understand it," he said per-

plexedly.

I raised the tube to my eyes, and almost immediately I found the second horseman, who was now less than two hundred yards behind Uncle Charles, and riding at full speed.

As I watched he gained perceptibly. In another minute he was hardly a hundred yards behind, still riding on the

turf.

There was something secret and sinister in the affair that filled me with an unreasoning dismay. As yet I had no suspicion of the dreadful truth. But a presentiment of dread fell on me.

Then, all in an instant, the tragedy happened. The pursuer pulled his horse- abruptly to its haunches. Then, as the animal rested motionless, I saw a tiny jet of flame leap over its head.

My glance jumped to the pursued. I saw him throw up his hands and fall

from the saddle.

I gave a great cry, which caused Billy to gape at me amazedly.

"Uncle Charles!" I gasped. "See!

Oh, my God!"

I thrust the telescope toward my brother, and turned my face. For the moment I dared not look down into the valley.

A sharp exclamation of distress came from Billy.

"Why, Uncle Charles has been thrown," he burst forth. "He's lying all huddled up in the road. The man's hurrying up to help him. Oh, he may be seriously hurt. We must go to him. It's dreadful to stand here doing nothing while he's suffering there."
"The other shot him!" I cried, turn-

ing again to look down on the scene of crime. "Shot him in the back-coward

and murderer!"

"Shot him!" Billy's face was like a sheet; the hands on the telescope trem-

"Yes, shot him! That's the reason he kept on the turf-to deaden the sound of his horse's hoofs, so uncle would have no warning. And we are powerless. Before we can get there, all will be over. Oh, was there ever such a ghastly situation? Our uncle shot down before our eyes, and we have to stand by helpless and permit the infamy!"

"That-that man is off his horse now," Billy reported. "He's stooping

over uncle."

I could make out dimly that this was so.

"Has uncle moved?" I asked.

My voice was low, for a great fear was on me.

Billy's voice was broken as he answered:

" No."

We stood side by side, staring down at the dreadful spectacle in an agony of despair and rage.

"He is robbing him now," I mut-

"Yes, that is it," Billy agreed. "Uncle Charles didn't have an enemy in the world. The man must have guessed he had money, and so shot him in the back, that he might take it without danger."

"José!" I cried. "Yes, yes, it must be José! He comes at his victims from behind. It is José."

"You're right—it must be José. He's big, this man. He's standing up now. He's very large."

"Then it must be José," I said.

" May Heaven-"

"Come, let us go," Billy cried, in a sudden frenzy. "We must catch him -kill him-avenge-"

But I placed a restraining hand on

my brother's arm.

"No," I said. "Wait a moment. It's not likely it can make any difference now. But watch which direction José takes. Keep your eye on him through the telescope as long as you can."

"He's galloping off now."

"Which way?"

"Straight west, He's turned off the trail and is riding to the mountains."

"Line him with something," I directed, "so that you will know the general direction whenever he disappears. That will help us when we set out after him."

I had no manner of doubt that this must be José, the most notorious outlaw of the region. He had been described to us as a man of great size and enormous strength, who made his retreat somewhere among the fastnesses of the mountain ranges to the west, toward which this man was now hurrying.

For some time he had not been heard of, and this had lulled the community into a sense of false security—how false was proven by the ghastly crime done before our very eyes.

"He has disappeared," Billy re-

ported at last.

"Can you mark in any way the point toward which he was making?"

Billy studied the mountains for a moment in silence.

"Do you see where the four summits crowd together at the back, with a little one in front of them?"

" Yes."

"Well, then, the way he was going in a straight line would take him to that

smaller peak."

The news gave me a thrill of savage joy. One of the peons had told me of a great cañon or barranca lying behind that peak, and he had said in addition that many thought José's secret retreat was there. Some color was lent to this theory by the fact that when finally soldiers were sent into the barranca after the outlaw, though they failed to find any trace of him, his depredations abruptly ceased, as if he had been forced to flee afar.

I thanked God that we had at least one clue to guide us on the track of our enemy. "And now we must go," I said.

We scrambled down the mountainside with desperate speed. Yet the haste we made was a mockery to us. It was the irony of fate. We ran and leaped too late. When our presence might have availed, we had been forced to stand remote, unseen, unheard—unhearing, too, but not, alas! unseeing.

We had gazed with strained eyes at the crime, unable to stay its course in any particle. The grisly mockery of our plight made our grief more poignant,

our rage the fiercer.

Presently we came to our horses, and in a trice we were mounted and off. At top speed we galloped down the steep slopes toward that still something we had seen lying black in the white dust of the trail.

Our excitement found relief in the swift movement—a movement that was dangerous, too, for the way was through underbrush dotted with boulders which had fallen from the cliffs behind. It required all our skill to hold to our saddles. Often we had to throw ourselves flat on the horses' flanks to escape a low-sweeping branch, or cling to the pommel for dear life, when our steeds swerved swiftly from an unexpected rock in the course.

It was the fortune of heaven that saved us, for I have been over that mountainside since, and to my sober senses it seemed impossible that two horsemen could have thus raced through the wilderness without blow or fall. Yet, so it was with us, and we came at last into the trail quite unharmed.

Our horses were puffing mightily, and their need and our own reluctance made us move forward at a walk. Yet, while we dreaded that which awaited us, a strange sense of responsibility strengthened our courage.

Suddenly, at a turn in the trail, Billy, whose bronco had begun to prance ahead, pulled the horse on its haunches, and uttered a shout. I quickened my pace, and when I reached his side pulled up my horse as shortly as he had done.

In the roadway, scarcely a rod before us, lay that black, huddled figure we had seen from the mountain-top, but now the horror of it was greater, for the body lay on its back and the face showed ghastly with staring eyes, cold and dead.

And the face was the one we had known and loved, that of our dear Uncle Charles.

For a time we spoke no word. The silence was broken only by the pitiful snorting of the horses, which trembled in the presence of the dead.

Then Billy turned to me:

"I swear to avenge him, John!"

"I make that oath with you," I answered and we clasped hands, registering our vow against the assassin.

"And now let us learn what we can," I suggested. "Doubtless he has been robbed as well as murdered, but we must make sure. If by any chance the money has been left untouched, we must secure it and take it home, but there is no hope of that."

"No," agreed Billy savagely. "Uncle Charles had no enemies. There was none to wage a vendetta against him, none who would kill and not rob."

When we had tethered our horses, we slowly approached the body. It was the work of only a moment to assure ourselves that nothing of value had been left on the victim.

Undoubtedly, our first theory was right, and we had witnessed the latest, the most fatal, in the long list of José's crimes.

An uncanny spell seemed to bind us to the place, but at last, as the sun was dipping to the mountains, I set my face toward home, riding with heavy heart. Billy remained with the body, to await the coming of those I should send to him.

### CHAPTER II.

### HOT ON THE TRAIL.

EARLY on the day following the funeral, we set forth on the trail of José, heading straight for the smaller peak toward which the outlaw had flêd, and beyond which the great cañon lay. Late in the afternoon of the third day we came to the cañon, and with much difficulty and some danger descended into it.

We went guardedly, too, for we believed that we now approached the haunt of the bandit, and we knew not in what spot he might be lurking. It behooved us to be careful that he should not see us before we sighted him. We never doubted that he would shoot us from ambush without the slightest compunction

The shadows of night came down swiftly as we stood debating our course, and we decided to go a little way in search of a safe nook in which to sleep. So we followed the base of the precipice toward the north until we reached a huge boulder, one side of which was so broken that we could mount to the top.

We crawled up this, and found, as we had suspected, that the top surface of thestone formed a floor about a square rod in size. We decided to pass the night here, thinking that our station was secure from attack or discovery.

So, indeed, the event proved. When we awoke in the morning we had been refreshed by a sleep quite undisturbed.

As we breakfasted off the dried meat and biscuits in our knapsacks, we discussed our next movements, and determined first to traverse the *barranca* to the south, in search of José's retreat; then, if we found nothing in that direction, after going a reasonable distance, we would try going north.

"See there," said Billy, as we stood

"See there," said Billy, as we stood up preparatory to setting forth; "doesn't that look like a wigwam?"

As he spoke, he pointed toward the farther side of the barranca. My gaze followed his gesture, and I saw an object, distant perhaps half a mile, which did in fact resemble a hut or tent, but we could make out nothing more definite.

"Let's go there first," Billy suggested, and I assented.

Forthwith we started down the boulder and hastened forward. Our progress, however, was very slow. The bed of the barranca was of ragged stone seamed with fissures that gaped threateningly. Some of the smaller ones we leaped, but often we were forced out of our course in order to avoid the larger ones.

In two or three places small streams flowed in channels of stone. Occasionally we came on boiling springs, and we found one geyser where the column of steam mounted half a hundred feet in the air. Yet these objects hardly at-

tracted our attention, for our devotion to the aim of the adventure was so great that we gave them no more than a pass-

ing glance.

When, finally, we came near the seeming hut we found that it was a domed mass of pumice, similar to many we had already passed, relics of volcanic action in the barranca. But this great bubble was larger than any of its neighbors, fully ten feet in height and as much in its greatest diameter.

We surveyed it without enthusiasm, for we were disappointed to find that after all it was not the outlaw's dwell-

ing-place.

We had gone on perhaps fifty yards when I chanced to look back, and as my glance fell on the dome I gave a start of surprise.

"I say, Billy," I called to my brother, who was in advance, "I believe there's

a kole in that thing.'

"What do you mean?" questioned Billy, staring around.

"Back there in what we thought was

the hut.'

Billy looked and his face grew eager. "Sure enough, so there is." With that he set out running back, and I with him

When we came to the place, we found that on the side hidden from us as we approached there was an uneven hole about five feet in circumference. We peered through this, and our hearts leaped within us, for a glance showed us that we had chanced on José's secret home.

Yet there was little joy in the discovery, for the hut was empty. We must

search farther for our prey.

We could see but dimly at first, as all the light in this natural hut came through the hole into which our heads were thrust. However, we could make our that some skins lay on the ground, and a rude table of stones stood before a cairn that evidently served as a chair.

"Well, let's go in," Billy suggested, after our first exclamations had died

away.

I assented, and he crawled through

the opening. I followed him.

"A curious place," Billy declared, and I had every reason to agree with him.

The tiny room was almost bare, for

the furniture was no more than I have described, save for a few bones and other remnants of food that littered the floor. Yet we dared hope that we might find here some clue to guide our quest.

So we poked the walls and scrutinized the floor, but all in vain. The natural floor and walls were unbroken and could afford no hiding-place. We examined the table, but as it was made up of three pieces of stone we were soon satisfied that there was nothing concealed in it.

"There is the cairn," Billy suggested.
"Not a likely field," I answered

slightingly.

"Anyhow, here goes for a look," Billy said, and forthwith he began to scatter the materials of the rough chair.

"We'll have to put them back," I

remonstrated.

"Why should we?" Billy demanded

in surprise.

"Because," I replied, "if we can't get any trace of the money otherwise, we must keep on José's trail until he leads us to it. But he must have no hint that we are following him. If he were to suspect our presence, he might ambush us after the cheerful habit he has. So, when we're through with searching the stone pile, we must rebuild it, for he is likely to return here any time."

"All right," Billy remarked senten-

tiously.

He had now reached the bottom of the heap without having made any discovery, so he at once set about piling the stones up again, in which I aided him.

The top stone was a flat, broad one, and I was just lifting it to its place when my eye was caught by a gleam of white on the under surface. I turned the stone over, and there, written in chalk on the gray slate, was the following:

## N. 17 Sul 12

"Here, Billy," I called, "I believe I've found a clue."

"A clue?"

"Yes, to the place where José keeps his plunder. It reads like the regular thing that pirates and all that sort, you know, use for a record of buried treasure."

"What! a cipher?" Billy questioned with new eagerness as he came to look.

"Yes, you see it's written on the stone here, and must be a memorandum of something so important that he doesn't dare to trust its whereabouts to his memory alone. It's not exactly a cipher, for it is all written out so clearly, but it's just as good."

"What does it mean?" Billy asked, after studying the stone for a time in

silence.

But I was forced to confess that its meaning was more than I could fathom.

"We must make a copy of this to take with us," I suggested; "then we can study it at our leisure."

We had no pencil, but we scratched the inscription rudely with a knife-point on my knapsack.

"Is it all down?" Billy asked.

"Yes," I answered; "let's get out of the place now."

" Just wait a minute," said Billy.

Thereupon he rubbed his cap over the stone, and removed the writing.

"Now," he explained, "if José happens to become forgetful, this little geography won't help him much."

"Now," I said, when we were again outside, "we must see if we can't find some place near by where we can comfortably study that cipher, and keep a sharp lookout at the same time for José."

We wandered some distance from the hut, seeking a suitable hiding-place, and at last came on a nook in the west wall of the cañon, where we were hardly visible, though we had a clear view of all that part of the barranca. Here we camped, and first of all we made ready our dinner, for it was now noon, and we had sufficient appetite to flavor our dry fare.

When the meal was done, we discussed

the outlaw's memorandum.

"N must mean north, of course," I hazarded.

"Yes, you go north seventeen somethings from somewhere."

"Probably from the outlaw's hut," I

suggestèd.

"But how are we to tell what the seventeen things are?" Billy demanded. "They might be feet, or rods, or miles, or inches."

"We might try each in turn, and see," I said. "Probably, though, it's paces. That's the usual thing."

"But there's the Sul part of it," Billy objected. "Now, what on earth-is Sul? And what is 12?"

I confessed that I had no guess to offer. We reflected for a time in silence. Then, when I realized that I was unlikely to hit on any interpretation of the phrase, I stood up.

"I can't bear this inaction, Billy," I declared. "I must make some sort of effort, however useless it may be."

"I understand. But what?"

"Well, suppose we go to the hut, and work back from it, carefully, to the north, keeping a sharp lookout for anything that may turn up. In that way we are bound to cover the seventeen inches, or feet, or paces, or rods—anything under miles."

Billy assented, so we went back to the hut, and then began a tedious progress toward the north. We studied almost every inch of our course, but we could fix on nothing as a standard of measurement.

The rocks that littered the place were too irregular to answer the purpose, and nothing else seemed repeated in any order. We rambled on, however, all the afternoon, covering a distance of perhaps seven miles.

The labor was wholly vain, so at last we set out to return to the cleft in the rock, for we wished to keep in the neighborhood of the hut. Here we spent

the night.

I awoke in the morning to find Billy

standing over me, finger on lip.

"Keep quiet, Jack, he's there!" my brother whispered. "See!"

### CHAPTER III.

NURSING THE QUARRY.

THE words startled me into instant wakefulness.

"What? José?" I questioned in an

eager undertone.

"Yes, José. But be careful. The villain is sitting outside his hut. Peep over and you can see him."

I crept stealthily to the edge of the hollow in which we were sheltered, and looked forth. Yes, there he sat, lounging on the ground, his back against the wall of the hut, smoking a cigarette.

I stared, fascinated, at our enemy. I knew at once that this was José, for besides his massive bulk, there was the long scar across one side of his face, of which we had been told. I studied him at my leisure, and the survey made me sick at heart.

If ever merciless cruelty was written in the lines of a countenance—in the curves of the brow, in the glowering of the eyes, in the thin, compressed lips—it was written in that man's. He looked the scoundrel every inch of him, and, as I regarded him, my gorge rose at the thought that here before me reposed the assassin of my uncle.

I could easily have shot him as I sat there, and my heart would have found pleasure in the deed; but I realized that to kill him were to destroy perhaps our only chance of tracing the money. Therefore, his life was sacred

for the present.

We discussed an effort for his capture, but abandoned the idea for the time being, since the nature of the man led us to believe that threats would not force him to reveal his secrets. It seemed wiser to watch and follow him, in the hope that he might lead us unwittingly to the object of our desire.

At the end of half an hour, José lazily stretched himself. Then he crawled into the hut, and in a moment came out again, carrying a small bundle in his hand. Without any pause, he turned about and walked briskly up the

barranca toward the north.

"Wait until he gets farther away before we start to follow him," I remonstrated, for José had not gone two paces when Billy prepared to set out in pursuit.

"But suppose he doesn't come back this way?" Billy argued. "We might

lose him altogether."

"I don't see how," I said. "If he's going to leave the barranca he's pretty sure to go by the way we came, so that all we have to do is to keep our eyes on the cliff there. If he doesn't climb out we can keep just close enough to see him, without any danger of his seeing us."

By this time the outlaw had gone on until he was about a quarter of a mile from us, and I deemed it prudent to begin stalking him. So we scrambled down from our nook and started working our way carefully north, darting from boulder to boulder, and taking pains to expose ourselves only when we had José in view, and therefore were sure that he was not looking in our direction.

The day wore on, and still we dodged forward, tired by the constant strain, but not daring to relax our caution. We managed to eat something in short halts, and once we tried some water from one of the tiny streams, but it was so sulfurous that we could get no satisfaction from it.

It was nearly noon, as I judged from the sun's height, when we lost sight of José completely. Often he had disappeared from our view beyond the boulders that lay between us, but always we had caught sight of him again ere many minutes had passed. Now, however, we waited in vain.

We peered here and there, but all to no purpose. Our quarry had completely vanished, and we began to grow alarmed lest in some way he had come to suspect that he was being followed. But a little later I caught sight of him coming straight toward us and distant scarcely two hundred yards.

I whipped around a boulder out of sight, dragging Billy with me, while bidding him be silent.

"What is it? José?" he whispered.
"Yes," I answered softly. "We must
get away from this; he'll be up with us
in a minute now."

"Has he seen us, do you think?"

"No. Make a straight line back to the next boulder, keeping this one between him and us. Then we can get to another one. Only, we must go faster than he does, and we must make no noise. Come on."

I set out at once, half-running, but careful to avoid any noise, Billy just behind me. The next boulder was only about ten rods from our starting-point, and I hoped we might reach it without José's observing us, for the boulder we had left shut off his view in our direction, and, though I kept turning my head as I hastened, I could see nothing of him.

We soon came to the boulder and got

behind it just in time. When I peered around it a moment later, José was coming in sight, but farther away than before. Evidently we were gaining on him

This encouraged us to set out for another and larger rock somewhat to our right, where, as we judged, our flight would be cut off from José's view by the boulder we left. We ran rapidly to this, for we did not believe the outlaw could hear the slight noise of our steps at such a distance.

When we reached the stone, we found it hollowed on the far side, so that we ventured to trust ourselves in the shelter of it until the enemy should have

passed.

We waited in silence and marked the approach of José by the sound of his steps, which we could soon hear distinctly. He steadily approached us, but did not come nearer than perhaps fifty yards.

As the noise of his walking grew faint again, I ventured once more to look out from our shelter. I found that the outlaw was a long way from us. As he had his back turned squarely toward us, he was doubtless quite in ignorance of our presence near him.

"The best thing we can do," Billy said, when I had told him of this, "is to wait here until he has had time to get back to the hut, then go round carefully, and so work back to our old place

in the cliff."

I assented to this, adding, however, that we would do well to keep a lookout on the cliffs, so that we might know if José should be leaving the *barranca*.

We continued quiet for nearly an hour, then our impatience became so great that we decided to go forward. But we went straight to the precipice farthest from the hut and picked our way along the base of it, moving as silently as we could and keeping a constant guard against surprise.

After a time we came to a point whence we could see the hut, and there we discovered José, seated smoking as before. We continued our progress until we had passed a half-mile beyond our destination. Then we moved across the floor of the *barranca*, taking care so to guide our course that we had always

something between the man and ourselves to hide us from his sight. By such means, we came at last to our niche in the rock.

We climbed into it from the south end, and, safe in its shelter, rested and ate. When night fell, our last view of the outlaw showed him sitting placidly before his hut, smoking.

Now it occurred to me that José, when he reappeared, did not carry the parcel with which he had started from the hut. I spoke of this to Billy.

"Why," he exclaimed eagerly, "sure enough. It must have been more booty."

"And it's likely that he has hidden it at N. 17——"

"Aye, that's it," Billy interrupted. "And we know now pretty near where the place is, for he was out of sight only for a few minutes. He couldn't have gone far."

"With that help we ought to hit the

spot."

"We're sure to—if we hunt long enough," was Billy's confident declaration. "We'll begin the search tomorrow."

We discussed the question of mounting guard, turn and turn about through the night, but the enemy's ignorance of our presence in the *barranca*, together with the fact that there was nothing likely to lead him in our direction during the night, made us decide that it would be folly to weary ourselves with a task so needless.

We lay down in our blankets and were sound asleep almost at the closing

of our eyes.

I was awakened in the gray light of the morning by hearing a strange voice shouting. I opened my eyes in a sudden stupid terror, and there before me stood José, with an evil grin, his cocked gun pointed full at my face.

### CHAPTER IV.

### THE TRAPPERS TRAPPED.

For a moment I could only stare in amazement, without comprehending the disaster that had befallen. But a startled exclamation from my brother attracted my attention, and I turned toward him.

He, too, was sitting up, and over him stood a big negro, who held a gun, covering him. At the sight there swept over me a realization of the catastrophe.

I saw that for the present at least any effort to escape was an impossibility, for our guns were nowhere in sight, and I shuddered. What the future might hold I could not guess, but it was certain that for the time being we were trapped, and the recovery of the money delayed for an uncertain period, if indeed it should ever be achieved.

Again I shuddered as I met Billy's eye. In it I read my own despair. And it was all the fault of our carelessness in not mounting guard when we were in the stronghold of the enemy.

"Ho! ho!" the ruffian jeered. "You thought that José had his eyes shut when you followed him. Ho! ho!"

He leered at us in triumph.

I was able to get his meaning, for we had both a fair knowledge of Spanish, but we had no spirit to answer him. We were at his mercy. He had the conqueror's right to taunt us.

Under the muzzles of the guns we were not inclined to reply in kind to his jeers. So we remained quiet, waiting.

"You are strong, healthy young men," the bandit continued. "You will make good slaves, valuable slaves. I have a friend who will pay me well for you to work on his plantation."

"You would not dare-" Billy

began.

But José interrupted him contemptuously.

"You do not know José. José not dare! Ho!ho!"

"But the law—" I began in turn, only to be interrupted as Billy had been.

"The law—what is that down there? The only law you will know will be the lash of the overseer if you are lazy. The law! Ho! ho!"

For the instant I was tempted to risk all in a desperate attempt to overpower the ruffian, despite the threatening guns. But I could not catch Billy's eye, to signal my desire to him, and presently caner judgment prevailed.

It were folly to attempt violence now. José was huge and robust, and the negro gave every promise of strength superior to either Billy's or my own. And there

were the guns, while our own were out of reach

No, we must bide our time, take counsel together, and then on a fitting occasion make our effort, when there was promise of success. Otherwise, the villain might slay us both.

For the present we were helpless, and must bow to our unhappy fate as represented by the will of José. That will

was straightway made manifest.

"Give me your gun," José said to the negro, "and bind their hands."

The negro promptly handed his gun to the outlaw, and then produced from his pocket some strands of rather fine but exceedingly strong rope, with which he securely fastened together the wrists of each of us in turn. Then José lined us up in single file behind the negro, while he himself remained in the rear.

"March," he ordered; and we obediently moved forward, following the negro down the barranca toward the

south.

We held our course steadily throughout the day, with but a single halt, when José and the negro, Sanchez, made a hasty meal from some provisions carried by the latter. But Billy and I were given nothing to eat, and we had not brought anything with us.

As the result of our long fast—for we had had nothing since the night before—we lagged as the day waned, and were only prodded to an increased pace by the muzzles of the cocked guns. José freely threatened to shoot us for the de-

lay we caused.

It was just on the edge of dusk when we staggered down a rough path between the narrowed walls of the barranca. Those walls were greatly lowered, too, so that what had been a mighty cañon was now merely a ravine. And so, at last, we issued from it into a little valley where a narrow stream ran west and then curved with the valley somewhat toward the south.

Just before us was a tiny cove, and

in this lay a yawl, at anchor.

We halted on the bank of the stream. and Sanchez prepared a hasty meal. José and the negro ate, and then, while José stood guard over us with cocked gun, Sanchez unbound our hands and allowed us to satisfy in part our hunger.

Always I shall remember the joy that food caused me. Rough fare as it was, some miserable mixture of dried meat and cakes, it was manna to my palate and at the first mouthful a new strength seemed born in me.

When we had done, the two of us had taken heart of hope. We were still wofully weary, so that the least movement caused a pang, but vitality had revived in us, and our minds were keen again, our hearts almost cheery. So little a thing as a few bites of food makes the difference between a carcass and a man.

We even began to converse eagerly, for the first time that day. Hitherto we had been too sick of soul to do more than exchange a few words of lamentation. Now we discussed ways and means

of escape.

Our conference, however, resulted in nothing definite. We agreed that we could only hold ourselves alert, in readiness for the slightest sign of opportunity. We were greatly relieved when we found that José put no bar to our conversing in English, which, in all probability, he did not understand, as it left us free to communicate in any emergency without giving the outlaw any inkling of our meaning.

Our hands had been rebound as soon as the meal was ended, and after a while José ordered us to go on board the yawl, which Sanchez had brought in to the shore, and on which he was now busy

making sail.

There was nothing for it but to obey, and so we boarded the little craft, but I confess that I did so with the greatest reluctance. What was before us? Was it possible that we could be carried off into captivity, into slavery, as José had threatened?

In a vague way I had heard that such horrors still survived in remoter regions, but I had given no heed to the tales. Could they nevertheless be true, and was I destined, along with my brother, to suffer a fate so horrible?

A black rage seized me as I watched the negro getting up the sail. No, better to die in a vain effort to escape than live to feel the lash of the overseer. Then my courage swung back to me, and I vowed to escape, to win, to capture José, to recover the treasure.

This braggart resolution comforted me mightily, so that I chatted cheerfully enough with Billy as we squatted amidships.

The night had drawn down when at last the anchor was up, and the yawl ran with a favoring wind down the stream. But there was a brilliant moon, and the light of it was enough to show the way

clearly.

We were still among the mountains, but evidently rapidly escaping from them, for the ranges within sight grew constantly smaller. Indeed, we had been moving for little more than an hour when we left the last foot-hill behind and were in a plain where the river, joined by another, widened astonishingly.

An hour later a soft sound reached our ears, and I knew that we were drawing near the open sea. However, before we arrived I had fallen into a troubled

sleep.

I do not know how long I slept. When I awoke, the weather had thick-ened and an increasing wind came out of the northeast. I knew now we were at sea, for the force of the waves gave the small boat a most unpleasant motion. I was unable to sleep again and remained a prey to the gloomiest reflections.

Soon the sea ran dangerously high, and, I confess, a feeling of alarm possessed me, as the storm constantly

showed new strength.

"I should think he'd run for harbor somewhere," Billy remarked dolefully.

"He may not know of one anywhere near, though we can't be far from the coast," was my answer.

"Well, perhaps drowning is better than slavery," Billy returned philosophically; and with that we fell into silence.

So we remained with bound hands, in horrible inactivity, while the little craft tossed and struggled in the grip of the ocean.

Sanchez had reefed the sail at José's order, but the force of the favoring wind was such that the yawl fairly flew over the waves. It seemed to me that the outlaw would have been wiser to alter his course, for the waves broke over us constantly, but I could not yet bring myself to make any suggestion to this murderer of my uncle.

Besides, I knew full well that he

would disregard any advice I might give, no matter what its worth.

The strain of the situation told on me. The fierce movements of the boat, the constraint of narrow quarters with hands made fast, the lack of food, the nervous tension in the face of peril, these combined to break down my strength, so that at last I fell into a semiunconscious condition, during which I realized nothing clearly except the wild onslaughts of the waves and my own misery. Finally I lost sense of where I was completely.

I was aroused by a loud voice, yelling in my ears, accompanied by acute pain in my back. I opened my eyes and

stared about me wildly.

It was dim daylight, and I realized that some one stood over me, shouting. Then again the pain in my back gripped me, and I became wide awake.

It was José roaring at me and he punctuated his words with vicious thrusts from the muzzle of his gun. I sat up, cringing.

"Out with you! Out with you! Do you hear? Get out!" the brigand cried

wrathfully.

Even yet I did not understand. I looked around and saw that Billy was standing beside me. At the same moment I realized, too, that the gale had moderated, and that the yawl lay in the tiny harbor of a cay.

"Get up, and get out!" José repeated, in a rage, and again he thrust the gunbarrel violently into the small of my

back.

At that I struggled to my feet and stood beside Billy.

"What does it mean?" I asked in

English.

"Why, it means," my brother answered bitterly, "that our friend here is superstitious and believes that we are Jonahs. He swore to maroon us as a sacrifice to the devil if he rode out the gale. He's regularly scared and doesn't dare set sail with us on board. So he's leaving us here."

" Here!"

I gazed about me with dawning horror. The cay was not more than two furlongs in length; less than that in width. On it there was nothing—no verdure, no water, no shelter.

"Here!" I repeated softly, and fell silent.

At a nod from José, the negro came toward us, a long knife in his hand. At the sight I thought that this was to be the moment of our slaughter, and the idea was welcome.

Billy guessed my mind.

"No," he said, "José hasn't the nerve to kill us outright after his terror in the gale, or even to order us killed."

As he spoke, Sanchez reached our side, and with two strokes of the knife had set us both at liberty. For a moment I moved my arms freely, in delight at the release. Then the horror of the thing returned.

José addressed us brutally:

"There is food and water—now go!"
As he spoke, Sanchez offered us a small sack of provisions and a cask of water.

"Off with you!" José shouted. "I lose your price as slaves. I will not have you with me—no, not for a moment."

For a long moment I gazed into the evil face. The small black eyes were blazing, the brow beneath its tangle of hair was furrowed with wrath, the scar burned livid across his cheek, the mouth was set in the snarl of a trapped beast. There was fear in the shrinking poise of the burly frame.

The man was terrified. His rage was but a veneer over devouring horror. I wondered if the spirits of his victims had shrieked to him amid the uproars of the tempest. The man was a coward, and haggled with his superstition rather than confess the truth even to himself.

He was a coward, and therefore brutal, utterly heartless, conscienceless. He had issued his decree. He stood with cocked gun in hand, as did Sanchez. Appeal would be useless.

I had taken the cask of water into my hands. Billy had the provisions. I gave my brother one look. He nodded. I turned and leaped into the sea.

### CHAPTER V.

THE CLANK OF A GHASTLY ARMY.

We waded ashore, and then, worn as we were by our sufferings, dropped down on the sand, and sat there dripping.

We did not exchange words over our plight, but rested apathetic, our eves fixed on the yawl where Sanchez was already making sail. Presently all was ready, and the boat moved away.

As it gathered speed, José turned from his seat in the stern, shook his fist toward us, and shouted maledictions. But we paid no heed to him, only watched

dully.

I was so exhausted that I doubt if I even cursed him in my heart at that moment, though I made up for the lack afterward.

We remained thus stolid until the yawl disappeared in the haze of the sea's horizon. Then, finally, Billy aroused himself, and opened the bag of provisions.

"We must eat, old man," he said with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness, " so sit in."

I obeyed mechanically, for my fatigue was such as to make me forget even hunger. But the first mouthful awakencd appetite, and I devoured the rough food ravenously.

Then, having drunk deep from the cask, I toppled over on the dry sand and slept restfully. Billy, as he told me afterward, did the same thing.

It was late afternoon when I awoke, and I felt myself a new man. My appetite was still keen and I set straightway about getting another meal.

In moving the bag of provisions I disturbed Billy, and he sat up, staring about him in confusion. Then his mind cleared and gazed at me forlornly.

It was the first time indeed since our capture that we had been in fit shape physically and mentally to consider our situation. So as we ate we talked.

"Here we are, marooned," Billy began, "with provisions and water for a few days at best, and no means of get-

ting more."

"I suppose we could do with shellfish or seaweed or turtles or something of the sort for food," I said, "but the water is strictly limited to the supply in the cask."

"Do you suppose we could make it hold out for a week?" Billy asked, eying the cask wistfully.

"I doubt it, but we shall do the best

we can."

"Well," my brother declared, "we must use every care, for if the water gives out before any one sights this island we are done for."

"Yes," I agreed. "There is no way for us to leave. There's no land in sight even. It may be a hundred miles to the coast. We traveled fast in that gale. And there is nothing on this barren cay. not a stick of timber for a raft. can't so much as set up a signal of distress. We haven't a match to light a beacon, or anything burnable to make it of if we had the matches. Usually in shipwrecks and when any one is marooned, there's water from a stream or a spring and heaps of wood and-We are in the worst position matches. possible."

There's no hope for us unless somebody takes us off. And not having a signal of distress is a bad matter. The cay is so small and low that a passing ship would have to be very close in or-

der to see it-and us."

"It all depends," I said, "on whether or not we are in the track of vessels. If we are we have a chance, though a small But if we are not we have no chance, not the slightest, for there is nothing in the world to bring a vessel of any kind out of its way in order to visit this miserable bit of sand."

"That's true enough," Billy admitted

reluctantly.

He remained silent for a while, gazing thoughtfully out at sea. When he spoke again it was a trifle more cheerfully.

"I wonder why José came here?"

"That is simple," I answered. put into this place to find shelter from the storm when he was frightened. You see, though the cay itself is so small, there are reefs in plenty outside to serve as breakwaters, and the channel is wide."

"Yes, I see," said my brother. "But how did he know of the existence of the

island?"

I paused to reflect for a minute.

"You mean," I said finally, "that the cay must lie somehow in the sailing line or he wouldn't have known of its existence."

Billy nodded.

"I think you are right. And," I continued with some excitement, "the island must be near the coast, or he would not. sail by it, for he would probably never venture far out to sea in so small a boat."

"Good. I hadn't thought of that. Still." Billy ended unhappily, "I don't know that it makes any difference about being near the coast, as we have no means of getting there."

And to this I had no answer.

After we had eaten, we explored the cay, though this was an absurd expedition, inasmuch as we could see the whole extent of it from any point. There was absolutely nothing discoverable could assist us in our plight.

So, as night drew down, we decided to go to sleep, partly because there was nothing else to do, and partly because we still felt to some extent the fatigue caused by the hardships we had under-

gone.

Yet, though I was tired, it was some time before I could calm my thoughts sufficiently for sleep. Now that my brain was clear, I realized to the full the horror of it all.

I was filled with a raging bitterness that the assassin of my uncle was to escape all punishment. Not only would he go scot-free for his other crimes, but now he had added to his list the outrage on my brother and myself, whom he had exposed to inevitable and torturing death.

For I could not close my eyes to the grisly fact that death must be our portion. As I canvassed the meager possibilities of escape, I was forced to acknowledge that every probability pointed to our perishing on this remote cay. Only a miracle could save us.

Darkness had fallen when at last I dozed. For a while I slept fitfully, but of a sudden I became broad awake, just why I could not understand at the time,

nor do I to this day.

Perhaps it was that inner self which perceived a menace of which otherwise I was not aware. Be that is it may, I sat upright and looked about me.

Then I beheld something that filled

me with amazement.

On every side of the cay was a moving border of white. The sand of the beaches was completely covered with what looked to be a thick litter of bones, and this litter was in motion.

As I watched in fascinated astonish-

ment I saw the white border widen. slowly but steadily. I sprang to my feet to investigate the phenomenon.

Then I laughed aloud at my own stupidity. The sound of my merriment

awoke Billy.

"What's the row?" he asked, sitting

up.
"I was startled for a moment by what I saw, and then I understood, and laughed at myself," I explained. "It's land-crabs."

"Heavens! I should say so!" cried Billy, staring at the creeping mass. "Why, there are millions of them."

"Easily," I agreed. "Well, it's lucky they can't hurt us. We have trouble enough, as it is."

"We surely have," Billy assented,

with lugubrious earnestness.

Then he lay down again and was

promptly asleep.

I. too, stretched myself out anew. but I was slower in falling back again into slumber. Even when, at last, I succeeded in dropping off, it was not for long. I awoke suddenly, with the conviction that some one or something had touched me.

I lay motionless for a moment, my eyes staring fixedly at the moon overhead, curiously afraid to look around me to discover the cause of my awakening. Then I sat up to investigate.

But as my eyes took in the scene, I

leaped to my feet with a vell.

For all about me were the land-crabs, a solid barrier that reached on every side to within a few inches of where I had lain. One of the creatures, advancing or pushed from behind, had touched me and thus roused me.

And there were myriads of the ghostly things on every side. The only free places were the spot I had occupied and that where Billy had been.

He, too, was now on his feet, gasping amazement, for my shout had awakened

"Good Providence! it's a nightmare!" Billy stuttered, aghast at what he saw.

"It's all of that, and worse," I said angrily, "because we are already awake. They are real, too real."

"I can't believe it," Billy persisted, his eyes roving about in bewilderment.

"Let one of them bite you, and you'll

believe fast enough," I retorted. "And they will if you don't watch out."

I spoke the truth, for while we were speaking the myriads ever increased. There seemed no end to the things. They were still issuing from the sea, although the cay was now completely covered, save the spots where our bodies had been.

And now I saw with dismay that even those two oases were diminishing in size. The crabs were slowly but relentlessly encroaching on the open spaces.

As I stood gazing, I could see the circle about me closing. The advance was gentle, regular, persistent, inevitable. There could be no danger to an active man from the swarming creatures, but there was something uncanny in the swaying swish and clank of the hosts as they crept ever nearer and nearer.

"They don't seem to be a bit afraid

of us," Billy said, wonderingly.

I laughed ruefully.

"No, it's rather the other way. I don't know how you feel, Billy, but I confess they get on my nerves. They can't hurt us, but they can bother us like the deuce. We can't sleep with these pests in possession of the island."

"Nor even sit down," my brother said. And it was true. The crabs were close about our feet now. Soon the line in front grew thicker as the mass squirmed onward. Certainly one could not sit here. The innumerable swarm would be all over him.

It was as Billy said, even to sit was impossible. A swift horror sprang in on me at the thought. How long could we endure standing thus, surrounded by the crowding invaders? And when we could no longer bear up under the fatigue of it, we would have to sink down exhausted.

I turned from the thought in sheer desperation. To let my imagination run this way was to court madness.

The crabs were now creeping over the bag of provisions at Billy's feet.

"Kick them away!" I cried. "They'll devour our food in a jiffy."

"Jove, I should think so! I forgot

the bag.'

Forthwith he thrust back the front ranks with his thick boots, and soon had a small cleared space.

The sight moved me to emulation. The mere contact with the hideous objects was repellant, repulsive even. I kicked away desperately, however, and soon I, too, had cleared a circle a yard in diameter.

"Will the cursed things never stop coming?" Billy growled presently.

He spoke with good reason, for the rampart made by pushing back the foremost at once began to move forward, and at the same time grew in height. And still the whole cay beyond was completely covered with the multitude.

I wondered how many more of the army remained beneath the waves, silently marching forward to throng with those already on the islet. Surely, I thought, there must be an end to them some time.

But I could see no sign of it. The mass swayed onward, ceaselessly increas-

ing. I grew sick with despair.

The horrible night wore on slowly. We talked little. Neither of us wished to voice his gloomy musings. From time to time, we attacked the encroaching crabs with a volley of kicks and thus maintained our reservation intact.

My brother, I believe, was as heart-sick as was I. It seemed that the malignity of fate had marked us for its own It was not enough to give us to a lingering death on this mote in the ocean; we had also to face an incredible horror; these myriads of evil things were to visit on us a torture as strange as it was frightful.

We seemed destined to die in a subtle torment, our bodies given to the waiting scavengers ere yet our souls were out of

them.

I stood musing thus, when a sharp pain in my knee caused me to look down. I saw with a shudder of fright that during my period of meditation the crabs had thickened about me until they were higher than my boot-tops. One of them had seized me sharply at the knee.

Instantly I tore the thing away with my hands, and hurled it into the sea. Then with nervous fury I kicked at the

swarming mass until exhausted.

The experience gave a ghastly reality to my morbid speculations of the moment before. I was faint with the hateful foretaste of what was to come.

A gleam of intelligence came to hearten me, and I called to Billy, who I saw

was close beset again.

"Come over here, Billy, and sit down to rest. When they get too close, I'll drive them back again. By taking turns we can manage all right—can even get what sleep we need."

"So we can," Billy answered with a ring of hope in his voice, and he forthwith plowed through the crabs to my side, where he seated himself with a sigh

of relief.

But after a little while he spoke again,

very gravely.

"We can stand them off easily as long as we have the strength. But when the food is gone, and the water, then—"

Silence fell—a silence broken only by the subtle clatter of the ghostly white crawling things that strove ever to come closer and closer.

### CHAPTER VI.

NIGHTS OF HORROR.

BUT with the dawn came that which seemed to us a miracle. The first glow of the sun brought a little cheer to the two of us, worn of body and soul by the dreadful night, but we looked for nothing beyond the relief that lies in light after darkness.

As the day began to break, however, a new movement agitated the millions clustered about us. At first, at the increased sound I thought that the loath-some legions were about to charge us, moved by some diabolical intelligence above their own.

But in a moment I perceived that the motion was retrograde. I watched in amazed incredulity. I could not believe the blessed fact. But it was true.

The whole body was hastening, crawling its liveliest back to the sea. Little by little the open place about us was growing. In a few minutes its size was doubled—then trebled.

This was no chance movement; it was an organized retreat. The crabs were returning into the sea.

We gazed at the unexpected sight with

profound joy.

"Thank God!" Billy said at last. And I echoed an "Amen." We felt safe from them now. They might come again, or they might not. At least we were rid of them for the present, and could take our fill of sleep and rest.

We knew that should they reappear while we were slumbering their first contact with us would awaken us. And we dared hope that they would not return. We decided that only some bizarre prank of nature had thus driven the multitudes upon the cay. Afterward, I learned that it was the habit of the creatures to leave the sea for the land at night and to withdraw again into the water at the first approach of dawn. So great was the effect of this deliverance that we We venbreakfasted in good spirits. tured to think that possibly Fate had turned in our favor. But if so, the further evidence of it did not at once appear. For another gale arose, and it was, I judged, even more violent than the one through which we had sailed. It began about noon, and continued steadily to increase in fury.

The sea had been rough still from the first blow, and now the waves beyond the reefs grew to tremendous proportions, so that I was for the moment thankful for our refuge on the cay.

But our situation, while in no way dangerous, was full of acute discomfort. As Billy declared, it was the deuce of a mess.

We had no shelter of any kind, and the rain fell in torrents. Hour after hour passed, and we could do nothing but crouch in sodden desolation on the sand, turning from time to time to offer a new front to the rage of the storm.

But the rain lessened by degrees as evening approached, so that I began to hope for better things. How vain was that hope!

It was when darkness had fallen that trouble came again. The advancing line of crabs issued from the sea.

"Great Heaven! they're coming again!" Billy cried, and shuddered.

"Yes," I said, and groaned.

There was no help for it; we were doomed to another night of suffering with the hosts. We were only thankful that we could fight them turn and turn about.

"I'll take the first watch," I told

Billy. "You lie down and get some

sleep."

The rain had quite ceased now. Billy was sopping wet, but he stretched himself obediently on the sand, and in a minute he was sleeping soundly.

I sat by his side, watching rank after rank of the crabs crawling stealthily out of the sea. As before, they came from every side of the island, and there was

no pause in their advance.

It occurred to me that it had been wiser to have selected our place in the center of the cay, rather than so near the sca, since thus the approach of the crabs might have been delayed somewhat, but I had not the heart to awaken Billy. So we remained on the sand a few rods from the sea, while our enemies steadily drew closer.

It seemed that their advance was alarmingly swift. The night before I had not seen them thus on their first appearance, but I fancied that to-night they were really more active in their movements. It was perhaps the result of something in changed weather conditions, or possibly in the ocean currents.

Whatever the cause they crowded forward with disconcerting haste, and it was not long before those on the sea side of us were within a yard. I waited until the line was hardly a foot from me before I began thrusting them back

with my foot.

The task was easy enough at the start, for the crabs were in a single layer as yet, and it was only on the sea side that I had to drive them back. Billy slept on serenely, undisturbed by the crackling rustle of the creatures' progress, or the sound of my boots striking them.

But as I pushed back the throng, the crabs continued their movement forward, until they had passed me a little way on either side, then they circled in again, and in a little while they had surrounded us on all sides, although as yet those from the other shore of the island were at some distance.

This fact made me realize fully for the first time, that the movement was not merely a steady struggle for the dry land, but a definite attack.

Still, there was no difficulty in keeping them at a distance, but the numbers were increasing with frightful rapidity. Already the circle about us was of two or three layers thickness, and not for an instant could I relax my efforts.

Soon I perceived, to my horror, that I must make the circuit around my sleeping brother with greater rapidity or some of the creatures would be on him. Five minutes later I was fairly running around the line, kicking desperately at every step.

Not only that, but at every lap I was

forced to mend my pace.

My breathing grew labored, my head was spinning, my heart thumping, and my feet were like lead when at last I realized that the labor was beyond my strength. The line of advancing crabs from the other sides of the cay had now come up with the others and there was a great and growing pile of the creatures all about me.

The wall about us was so high now that it was only with the utmost difficulty that I could thrust it back at all. With my failing strength, I could no longer maintain the open spot. I shouted at Billy as I leaped and ran.

In a moment he sat up, rubbing his

eyes.

"Quick, quick, Billy!" I cried, for I was near falling with fatigue.

He sprang to his feet and looked about him. Then without a word he was attacking the mass, with strength and ferocity that did my heart good to see.

I sank down where he had been, and watched him dully. I was too worn with my toil to think even. I forgot the crabs, everything, in the blessed joy of rest.

It was perhaps a half-hour later when the sound of Billy's voice aroused me.

"You must help," he was crying to me, as he ran at the threatening wall.

At the same moment a sharp pain in my right hand, which was resting on the ground, awoke me to complete consciousness. I shook the evil thing from me, and leaped to my feet.

A frenzy of rage against the crowding things possessed me and for a minute I fought them so fiercely that I had cleared the spot again. But the effort left me weak and trembling.

"I can't stand much more of this," Billy said brokenly, and there was despair in his voice.

That despair echoed in my heart. Billy was exhausted by his desperate struggle against the rapacious hordes. So was I. It seemed inevitable that very soon we must sink down exhausted amid the hungry monsters. And then——

In that moment of despair I had an inspiration. It was an idea that gave no certainty of escape from a hideous fate, but it offered hope, and hope to us then was new life.

"Come," I said to my brother.

"Come?" he repeated vaguely.
"Where?"

"Anywhere out of this circle," I ex-

plained

As I spoke I leaped the waist-high wall that surrounded us. I almost fell as I struck into the mass beyond up to my knees, but I caught my balance, by the mercy of Heaven, and in a minute more I had plowed my way through the writhing things until the crabs reached hardly to my ankles.

"Come," I shouted again to Billy.

This time he obeyed me promptly, and very soon he was at my side. We kicked the beasts clear of us, and sat down for a little rest.

For the moment we were safe. The vast bulk of the crabs were gathered about the spot where we had been. Elsewhere on the cay they were only two or three layers deep, so that we were able to hold them at bay.

It was thus that we came alive out of the terrors of that night. From time to time we changed our position as the mass about us thickened with the crowding of the relentless creatures, and by this means we thwarted them.

But we could hardly stand for weakness, though to fall meant death.

When the first gray of dawn shone in the east, I sent all my soul into a prayer that again these enemies that had come in the darkness would flee from the light of day. And again, to our unspeakable joy, the advancing light drove the myriads back to their secret places under the sea, and we were left alone, to sink down in a stupor of rest.

I do not know how long I slept, but when I awoke I judged by the position of the sun that it was about the middle of the afternoon. I found myself greatly refreshed, but outrageously hungry: The gnawing within me drove my thoughts to the provisions, and I got up, to go in search of them. I came to the place on the shore where they had been, but I could see nothing of them. I stared all about anxiously, but there was no trace of the bag or the water cask.

Then and then only, I remembered the crabs. We had fled in wild dismay from the spot to escape our foes, and in the stress of our emotion had forgotten to take the provisions with us. They had gone to glut the famished creatures that sought to feed on us.

As the situation became clear to me, I again fell into despair. It was thus that Fate broke us down with repeated blows.

I knew that after the struggle of the past night, the weakening of our strength by starvation must leave us helpless at the mercy of the crabs long before the next night had passed. Death was certain now.

I looked at Billy, who was still asleep, and I had not the heart to waken him. Every moment of unconsciousness was a moment stolen from despair.

And then, presently, my brother awoke and came to where I still stood, and looked about him even as I had looked. At last, without a word, he turned and gazed into my eyes.

He read his own knowledge reflected there, and still without a word, he faced about and stood looking out to sea.

After a while I flung myself down on the sand, and there I sat in abject despair.

What hurt me most was that I had failed so terribly. I had planned to avenge my uncle's death, to recover his money. I had accomplished worse than nothing.

Billy cast himself on the ground beside me, and in dead silence we gazed at the waste of ocean and thought the thoughts of hopelessness.

The sun was close to the horizon, when my eye caught a bit of blackness on the water, far away. I watched it idly, thinking it to be a bird. But as I gazed, the speck grew bigger, and I knew that this could be no bird.

A wild, incredulous hope sprang up in my bosom. I spoke to Billy:

"See, out there!" and I pointed.
"What is that?"

A moment he gazed, then:

"Jack, a ship! a ship! Oh, God!"

For it was a ship—there could be no doubt. And as it momentarily increased in bulk, we knew that it was approaching the cay.

But we knew, too, that it must come very close if those on board were to discover us on the tiny cay. We had hope indeed, but despairing doubts wrestled with it, for the ship might pass, all unmindful of our presence there.

We were in a maze of anxiety and uttered senseless ejaculations: "She veers!" "No!" "No, she's heading straight!" "She must! She must!" "No!" "Ves!"

Yes! For the ship, a cruiser, as we could now make out, was in truth so close at hand that it seemed impossible those on board could fail to see us. We danced, and ran back and forth, shouting our loudest. Then the speed of the vessel slackened.

We could distinguish men crowding to the side and gesticulating toward the cay. A boat began dropping toward the waves.

Billy and I shouted no more. Instead we fell into each other's arms and embraced like two Frenchmen.

"Saved! Oh, thank God! Thank God!" Billy muttered, and I echoed his words.

Afterward, we stood wordless and motionless, watching with glad, wet eyes as the boat was manned and moved forward briskly amid the reefs. But when it came safely out of the surf and into the shallow waters of the little bay, we screamed in mad joy, and ran with all speed toward it into the sea, and were swimming when at last the boat reached us, and we were drawn aboard.

After that I was hardly conscious for a time except of the glorious fact that every sweep of the oars took us farther from the grisly horrors of "Crab Cay."

## CHAPTER VII.

JOSÉ AGAIN.

We were so worn and wretched in appearance that our rescuers treated us without much respect, although kindly enough. They gave us food, and afterward we were allowed to sleep in the marines' bunks.

For the ship, we learned, was a Guatemalan cruiser. Another revolution had broken out, and only this cruiser remained in the hands of the government. The single battle-ship had fallen into the possession of the insurgents, owing to the disloyalty of its officers.

As it would have little chance against the battle-ship, the cruiser had sailed up the coast to remain out of the enemy's

We sailed back toward the south during the night, in the hope of securing despatches, and Billy and I had the best sleep we had had since leaving the hacienda of my uncle. But soon after dawn the sound of cannonading awoke us to new excitements.

We scrambled into our clothes and rushed on deck. There, close on our stern, was the battle-ship of the insurgents, and, as we gazed, a broadside roared from its heavy guns.

After that all was turmoil. Yet of the actual fighting Billy and I saw very little. The cruiser was short-handed, and an officer spying us idle, ordered us to the ammunition room to help in supplying the guns.

There was no use in remonstrance at a moment like that, and for that matter, we were not reluctant, since the cruiser had saved our lives, to work to save hers.

It was the first time I had ever been in action and I believe that being busy saved me some mental anguish, for I did not suffer from fear, nor did Billy, until we heard some one shouting that the ship was sinking. That started us in a hurry for the deck.

We had no mind after all the perils we had escaped to drown like rats in a

trap.

Quick as we were, however, we found that we were too late. All the boats that were still serviceable had already been lowered and, filled to the sinking point, were being cast loose from the cruiser. The decks contained many more men who had been unable to find place in the boats.

Some leaped into the sea, and were striking out lustily to get as far as possible from the dangerous neighborhood

of the sinking ship. The battle-ship, however, had ceased firing, for the cruiser had lowered the pennant, and we were all safe enough till such time as the ship should go down.

But the movement of the vessel gave evidence that the end was near. She fairly floundered in the surges, and shivered, as if with human fear of impending dissolution.

"There's nothing for it but to jump in and take our chance." I said.

"And the sooner we do it the better that chance is," Billy replied. "We are done for if we get sucked down by the cruiser when she goes under."

I found a couple of oars in one of the boats that had a hole in its side made by a cannon-ball, and these I threw overboard a rod or so from the vessel. Then the two of us sprang into the sea.

In a moment we had reached the oars. Using these as supports, for we did not know how long we might have to remain in the water, we set out swimming smartly toward the battle-ship.

We had gone but a little way when we saw boats putting off from the victor and going to the rescue of their swimming enemies. The sight relieved me much, for I had heard some unpleasant tales of the cruelties practised in times of war by these hot-blooded persons.

And in this instance, I knew that there was no hope for us save in the assistance of our conquerors.

And presently one of the boats came up, and we were drawn into it. It was hardly a minute after, and while yet we were some distance from the battle-ship, that the cruiser gave signs of the final catastrophe. She wallowed a moment in her death-struggle, then dipped a little, and disappeared beneath the waves forever. A few tardy men within the radius of her suction were drawn down in the swirl.

I watched for them to reappear, but they did not. I shuddered as I reflected on their fate that had so nearly been ours.

I had almost forgotten the fact that by the gift of chance I had unexpectedly become a prisoner of war. But I was reminded of this most unpleasantly the moment I stepped on the battle-ship's deck.

Two men were on me before I could make an attempt to resist. They bound my hands securely and then pushed me roughly before them to a corner of the deck out of the way. Billy was treated in a similar fashion.

I learned from the conversation of other prisoners that we were thus secured because the ship's brig was already crowded to overflowing with prisoners.

"Hope they don't shoot us," Billy re-.

marked disgustedly.

"Of course they won't," I replied blithely.

But, to tell the truth, I was none too sure.

Then we fell silent, studying a scene that was wholly novel to us. I was comparing the victorious insurgents with their captives, rather to the advantage of the former, when a stifled ejaculation from Billy attracted my notice.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I think my troubles have driven me mad," he replied doubtfully, "but I do wish you would look forward and tell me whom you see."

Greatly puzzled by his manner, I turned and looked as he bade me. On the instant, I was petrified with astonishment.

I stood with eyes popping and mouth agape. For there, with bound hands, within a rod of us, stood José.

Before the first trance of amazement had left me, the outlaw edged near to us, so that he might speak without being overheard.

"How did you get on the cruiser?" he asked with evident curiosity.

"Without any help from you, you scoundrel," Billy exclaimed. "You did your best to murder us."

José assumed a look of farcical hypocrisv.

"No, no," he declared earnestly. "I only left you for a short time, while I visited a place on the coast. I was on my way back when the gale was too heavy for me and the cruiser saw and rescued me. They put me, a gentleman, to work with the stokers. Curse them!"

His evil nature had full expression in his face as he spoke the last words.

Neither Billy nor I believed what he said as to his intention of returning for us. We had seen him commit one mur-

der, and we needed no information as to his wickedness.

But we were profoundly impressed by the curious fate that had thus brought us together again. I thanked Heaven that we were more evenly matched now than when we last met.

"Where is Sanchez?" I asked.

The answer of the brigand prompt:

Then he explained that shortly before his rescue by the cruiser Sanchez had been washed overboard by a heavy wave.

"The fool should have held on," José concluded. "Without him I couldn't

handle the vawl in the gale."

With that, he turned abruptly and - moved a little away from us, while Billy and I began a low-toned discussion of this freak of fortune and what it might

mean to us and our hopes.

Soon the boats returned with the final survivors of the cruiser, and immediately afterward the battle-ship steamed slowly south. From one of the seamen, who was good enough to chat with me, I learned that we would loiter near the coast until despatches were received. The insurgents had no mind to risk their ship under the guns of the harbor forts.

At last the vessel anchored within half a mile of rugged coast without any single evidence of mankind in sight. Here we were to wait for news.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and Billy and I were considering an appeal for relief to the captain—the success of which we mightily doubted, since we had nothing but our word to prove our story—when we were surprised to hear José speaking. He had quietly approached within a half-vard of us without our hearing or seeing him.

"I'll take you back to the barranca,"

he said softly and coolly.

Billy and I said nothing. What was there to say? The proposition was so undreamed of, so incredible, so contrary to any possibility that we could only sit in voiceless surprise, waiting for what might follow.

After a slight pause the outlaw continued, still in matter-of-fact tones:

"It is but just. I have been punished for trying to steal you away to sell as slaves. Yes. I have lost Sanchez.

have lost my yawl. I do not wish to lose my life. So I offer to save you, that the saints may take pity on me.

He paused again that we might have an opportunity to appreciate the beauties

of his repentance.

Billy turned and looked me in the eves. In his I read total disbelief, and I know he read the same in mine.

But José did not seem to notice our skeptical manner. It is likely that he did not expect us to believe him.

"If you will give me your word of honor not to attempt anything against me while we are on the way, I will help you to escape. We will steal a boat and you will help me sail it back to the river. I should need your aid in sailing the boat."

Again he paused.

I understood that in this need of our help lay the secret of his sudden charity toward us. Billy's eyes met mine for the second time, and I saw that he, too, appreciated now the motive of José's conduct.

"Do you agree?" the outlaw demanded abruptly.

"Tell us your plan," I said.

" No, not until you agree to go with me, and not to try to harm me. When we are back at the barranca we can go our separate ways. But you promise first. Otherwise I am silent."

"What will these folks do with us?"

Billy asked.

"Oh, just shoot you, or put you at hard labor with the convicts.'

José spoke authoritatively, and I was inclined to believe that he uttered the truth.

Billy and I argued the matter pro and con in whispers while José waited impatiently. The prospect before us was It might be years, if disheartening. ever, before we could make our escape. As yet José did not know that we had gone into the mountains in search of To give him a hint of our real quest would be to put him on his guard, and perhaps frustrate our aims for all time.

If we fell in with the outlaw's schemes, however, there was a chance of our returning to the barranca and continuing our search for the money-a chance, too, of capturing the bandit.

Here we had no chance of accomplishing

anything.

But we knew well that if we went into this undertaking with the assassin of our uncle we must keep ourselves on the alert every moment to guard against some treachery. He could trust our word of honor. We could not trust his. And so, at last, we decided to accept our enemy's offer.

José at once took us into his confi-He showed us where he had rubbed the rope that bound his hands against the gun-carriage until two of the strands were partly cut in two.

"Now I can break it when I wish." he

said proudly, "I am so strong."

He planned to wait until it had grown dark, then release himself and afterward us. He had a knife in his pocket and with this he would cut off a rope from one of the coils at hand long enough to let us down into the water without any telltale splash. After that it remained only to swim the half mile to the shore.

As to that, there would be no difficulty, for the tide would be near the full an hour after dark. Afterward, we must follow the coast south until we could discover and steal a seaworthy boat.

The plan seemed simple enough, and Billy and I approved it with glad hearts. José said nothing of sharks, or of other difficulties.

It had been a long time dark, and I began to fear that some hitch had occurred. There was no guard near, and I was anxious to begin the flight. Then I heard a whisper in my ear:

"Be quiet. Now is the time."

### CHAPTER VIII.

GETTING BACK AT JOSÈ.

I COULD see the huge figure of the outlaw dimly and felt the touch of steel as the knife-blade slipped through the rope that bound me. In another instant the three of us were at the side of the ship, where José showed us the rope dangling down to the water.

Without a sound the outlaw clambered over and then down, and so disappeared from our sight. I was the next.

With the utmost care to avoid any noise, I imitated our leader's movements, and after a short hand-under-hand descent I found my feet in the water. other instant, and only my head was above the waves.

Yet I held on to the rope as I found José was doing, lest I be swept away from the ship before Billy came.

In half a minute more, however, my brother was at my side and the three of us, close together, let ourselves drift on the hurrying waves. It was dark as pitch and we rested each a hand on the other's shoulder to avoid separating.

But José assured us that it was impossible for us to go wrong, since the tide must carry us to the beach which ran

for miles along this coast.

There was no outcry from the vessel and this cheered us, for it meant that our flight was not yet discovered, and every minute gained was of value. If we could but reach the shore before the ship's searchlight sought us out we would have a fair chance of escape.

And so, as fate willed it, the thing came about. A great wave swept us high on the beach. We scrambled to our feet and hurried on through the darkness at top speed until we entered a jungle.

Here we were soon forced to a halt by the tangled growths, but we dared hope we had gone far enough to conceal us from any prying eyes even with lanterns, and so we sank down to rest. We took no thought of snakes or other evil creatures, but stretched amid the grasses of the spot and fell sound asleep.

I was awakened by José an hour before sunrise, and at once the three of us made our way back out of the jungle, to the open country along the shore. This we followed toward the south for some time without seeing anything to arouse our apprehensions.

We could catch occasional glimpses of the battle-ship, which still remained at anchor. But we began to suffer severely from hunger and could find nothing that

offered a chance of a meal.

As Billy and I had had only a few hurried mouthfuls early the day before and had endured much since that scanty repast, we were in a bad way, and were unable to proceed at other than a slow pace, to José's obvious disgust. Luckily we found a small stream of clear water and were able to drink our fill.

I heard a distant sound, and listened attentively. Then I recognized it as the baying of hounds. José, too, heard it at the same moment and stopped short.

"This way—quick!" he cried.

He began running toward the northeast, which was at an angle to the way we had come.

"What is it?" I panted as I struggled

along at his side.

"Bloodhounds!" he answered. didn't suppose there were any about here. There must be a village farther inland. They've discovered our escape, and have put the bloodhounds on our trail."

Again a horror beset me. It seemed then that the disasters of our expedition were never to end. Earth and sea conspired to undo us. The animals were leagued against us as well as man.

First the crabs, now the hounds. I remembered fearful tales I had read of runaway slaves with the bloodhounds on their trail, and my heart turned sick with

despair.

With full strength escape would have been most difficult; but in our present state there seemed no possibility of winning away from the savage beasts. knew that for my part I could run but little farther. Soon I must fall down in my tracks and wait till the dogs came up.

A glance at Billy showed that he was in the same predicament. José, however, was running easily with no sign of

fatigue.

"Why do you go back? I cannot run much farther," I groaned.

"Be patient. It is only a little way now," the outlaw answered.

I said no more. It took all my breath for the running. And then, when it seemed to me that I must fall at the next step, we reached the stream where we had drunk.

Without pause José plunged in, and we after him. He turned up the stream and waded as fast as he could, while Billy and I followed obediently.

We understood now that José was employing the old plan of trying to throw the hounds off the scent by walking in

We waded in silence for nearly an hour. Then I refused to make another step, and José reluctantly consented to halt. But he bade us retrace our steps a little way to where there was an over-

hanging bank.

This was formed by the roots of a great tree which grew beside the stream. The lattice of roots had held the earth firm above them while the wear of the water had burrowed below, so that there was a little grotto here.

Into this we crept and I managed to pull myself out of the water and stretch along a lower tangle of roots as on a rough couch. José and Billy got similar resting-places, and there we awaited the

We could hear the baying of the hounds from time to time. Once they sounded very near, and I fancied that they were on our tracks leading to the stream. Afterward the baying sounded farther and farther away, but it never quite ceased throughout the day.

So all that day we remained beneath the bank, our only relief the drinking of enormous quantities of water. Toward nightfall, José ventured out and waded slowly up the stream a little way. When he returned he brought a handful of berries and roots, which he divided between Billy and myself.

I do not know to this day what the things were, but I do know that the taste of them to me then was as nectar. and that they refreshed me wonderfully. Afterward, despite the hardships of my couch, I fell asleep, and slept fitfully till

With the first light, we were off again, going straight south. In this, fortune favored us, for beyond was a bending of the shore, so that in two hours we came in sight of the sea.

The battle-ship was nowhere to be seen, and there was no sound of the

bloodhounds.

As yet we had not seen a hut or any sign of man, but in the middle of the afternoon, after mounting a little rise of ground, we saw a village that nestled in a hollow of the shore. In the small harbor several schooners lay at anchor. Our opportunity was at hand.

During the day we had eaten a few roots and berries gathered by José, and now he found more for us, and we quenched our thirst from a small stream

near by.

It was a strange thing to me that we

should thus be fed by our worst enemy. I was revolted by the fact, but I knew that he did it from no motive of kindness, but merely to save us for his own needs, so my conscience was clear.

From where we were we could see the few craft in the harbor clearly, and José selected a schooner that lay about a furlong off shore on the north side of the bay, next which we were. There was no boat with her, and we hoped that she was deserted and would remain so for the night ..

There was, however, the possibility that some one was out of sight in the cabin. We kept a careful watch throughout the remainder of the afternoon, but

no one appeared.

We determined to swim out to the schooner as soon as it was dark and take

Now, at last, it seemed that we were in a fair way to escape, and hope was high in us. We waited impatiently for

the coming of night.

It came at last. As it threatened to be overcast, we, remembering the blackness of the night before, hurried our movements, so that we set out while yet it was only dusk. We feared that later we might be unable to find the schooner in the night. So as soon as the darkness was sufficient to conceal us from any ordinary observer on shore, and before it had quite shut out the shadow of the schooner, Billy and I stood with José on the beach at its north curve, where we were at a safe distance from the houses in the village.

"Now we're all right, if the sharks

don't get us," José said.
"Sharks! Are there sharks here?" Billy demanded.

I waited for the reply with an anxiety

that was very close to fear.

"Of course," came the matter-of-fact answer. "In all these waters."

"Then, last night-" I began.

"I don't think they would stay around a naval engagement," José declared. "Still, I don't know."

"And they're here," Billy repeated

thoughtfully.

"One must take chances in this world," José answered lightly, and he waded into the sea.

At that moment I envied the man. He

had courage, this bandit, though he shot his victims in the back. It was, I believe, his single virtue.

I stood hesitating. I heard Billy repeat the one word "sharks," and they

were all my thought, too.

But sosé's action decided me. I could not afford to be beaten in bravery by the man I despised. I waded after him, and soon was swimming swiftly toward the schooner, Billy just behind me.

But again I was reviling fate. all nature was against us. Storms and beasts. Crabs, bloodhounds, now sharks. My fancy had one before me all the way, and one on either side, and another at my heels. My imagination had some member seized at every stroke.

By the grace of Heaven it was a short swim to the schooner. Had it been longer, I fear my courage, such as it was, would have failed me completely.

José reached the schooner's side just before me, and drew himself quickly I followed with all speed, on board. for I had a horrible premonition that one of the monsters would snap a leg off me at the very last moment.

Oh, the thrill of delight I felt as my feet came clear of the water-unharmed!

It was followed by a chill of horror, for as I stood upright on the deck I could see very dimly two swaying forms just before me. The larger of the two I knew to be Tosé—the other must be the schooner's owner.

I heard a strangled groan. The next second the smaller form shot over the side and sank with a loud splash into the

I made no movement, nor did Billy, who was now at my side. José vanished into the cabin. In a moment more he reappeared and approached us.

"Get up the anchor, one of you. The

other help me make sail."

I bade Billy to the anchor and went with José. Now I saw that he had two guns thrust under his arm. Again I cursed fate. He had both of us in his power for the second time. But I said nothing, only made haste to get up the sails.

Presently the sails bellied. sprang to the helm. Billy and I took our places amidships, ready to obey any commands of our skipper.

I told Billy of the guns, and his rage against fate was equal to my own. It did indeed seem fatal that he should have chanced on the weapons in the cabin of the schooner.

We discussed José's encounter with the man on the deck, and were mutually revolted by it. Yet, as fate willed, it was doubtless José's only course. The man was in the way of our escape.

The situation did not admit of niceties in conduct. None the less, the fate of that innocent man has been heavy on my conscience and on my brother's through

all the years.

There was a good, favoring wind and we were soon out of the bay. The night shut in black, and it came on to blow. I hoped that we were not destined to face another gale, but fate remained our foe.

Every moment increased the severity of the wind, and in the course of three hours it was a raging storm. The sea grew very heavy and we were constantly drenched by spray.

"We're in for more trouble," Billy

prophesied gloomily.

"José must know these waters pretty well," I answered. "He can guide his course by the wind."

"I can't see my hand before my face,"

Billy exclaimed; and it was true.

The schooner went plunging through the sea in long leaps, measured by the height of the waves. The wind was shricking, and that with the pounding of the waters made an uproar so great that we were now obliged to shout to each other in order to be understood, though we crouched side by side.

This din of the elements and the dark-

ness gave me an idea.

"I am going to try for those guns," I said.

"For the guns?" Billy exclaimed.
"But how? José——"

"If I'm lucky, José will know nothing about it until too late," I replied.

"Anyhow, I'm with you," my brother declared. "What's the plan?"

"No, you're not in this at all," I said. Then, as Billy began objections:

"You see, it's better that only one should take the risk, so that, at the worst, one of us will be left. But I don't propose to get the worst of this. It is so dark, and there's so much noise I think

I can creep to the stern and get the guns without José's knowing anything about it until it's all over."

Seeing that my resolve was unalterable, Billy ceased remonstrance and I forthwith began slowly crawling aft.

In the pitchy blackness I was unable to keep precise track of my whereabouts, and as I advanced I went ever more cautiously, for I had no mind to bump into José and thus give him warning of my presence.

It seemed to me fully a half-hour that I thus groped my way over the few yards of the boat's length. It was nerve-racking work at the best, for at any moment I believed I might tumble into the outlaw, and all the time I was straining my ears to hear and my eyes to see, though either was an impossibility just then.

Suddenly my extended right hand touched something that made me recoil. It was no part of the schooner that my fingers had lain on. I knew that I had

at last reached José.

I remained motionless, half-glad, half-fearful. Had he felt the contact? I held myself in readiness for an attack, but the seconds passed and none came. I began to be sure that he was unaware of my presence.

With infinite care, I extended my hand again, and felt along the gunwale for the weapons. Here and there my fingers roved searchingly without result. The

guns were not there.

For a moment I was puzzled. I had observed the position of the guns before it grew dark, and they had been on the side where I now was. It was apparent, then, that José had moved them. They must be on the other side of him.

He had doubtless altered their position in order better to suit his convenience at

the helm.

I moved back a little, that I might run no risk of touching José again, and began crawling across to the other side.

I had gone perhaps half-way, when without warning I was seized by the throat and dragged to my feet. I struck desperately at my enemy, but his reach was too great for me, and my blows fell short.

I felt myself strangling, yet I retained my presence of mind, I remembered my purpose. For now, as I stood, choking, one of my feet hit on something that I knew to be the stock of a gun. On the instant, with the instinct of desperation, I thrust upward with my foot. The weight on it told me that I had raised one at least of the guns—I dared hope both—and as it did not fall back I knew that one or both of the weapons had gone into the sea.

José relaxed the pressure on my throat, so that I was able to draw a few strug-

gling breaths

"What the devil does this mean?" he

shrieked at me.

Though he was at arm's length, I could see no faintest shadow of him, and his voice came thin through the tumult of the elements.

"I came for the guns," I shouted back.

"Blast you!" he answered, "get back where you belong, and stay there if you want to live. If you try again to get those guns, I'll kill you."

I decided it were wiser not to let him know that I had accomplished my purpose already, at least in part. I was like a child under his enormous strength.

I wondered if Billy and I together could overcome the man—and neither of us is a weakling. So now I waited silently for him to release me. And at last, after another vicious squeeze of my windpipe, by way of reminder, he let me go.

I went back vastly quicker than I had come, though still on all fours by reason of the schooner's tossing, and soon

butted into Billy.

He was overjoyed at my report.
"Jack, the luck has turned," he ex-

And I prayed that it might be so.

# CHAPTER IX.

A SUDDEN EXIT.

THE gale moderated as the night passed, but the sea was still high. We managed to eat a little, but the harsh motion and the floods of water from sea and sky kept us chilled and miserable.

The first gray of dawn was a delight to us. Then as day broke and we could see to a distance, for the rain had lessened, we made out to starboard a sketchy glimpse of coast-line. This, too, heartened us, and we made another rough meal from our provisions, while yet not exchanging a word with our host.

For that matter, José's manner did not suggest amiability. His scarred face was not good to look upon. He knew now, what I had hoped, that both the guns had gone overboard as the result of my effort, and we were therefore comparatively safe at his hands.

Evidently the knowledge enraged him, for he was scowling mightily, and his lips moved now and then in curses.

Two hours after dawn we were so close inshore that I could see the mouth of a river toward which we were heading, and from certain evidences I made no question but that it was that down which we had sailed into the sea. Presently we entered the stream. But the wind was not favorable for proceeding in a channel so narrow, and I saw that we must come to anchor.

José gave a turn of the helm that sent us shoreward, and called out to lower the sail and drop anchor. I jumped to the anchor and made ready to let go at the proper moment, while Billy busied himself with the sail.

I was watching the shore and holding the anchor in readiness for our closer approach, when a shout from Billy startled me. I whirled about and saw José darting toward my brother.

In his right hand was an ugly knife. I would have sprung forward, but before I could make a movement Billy had scrambled up one of the slender masts, which swayed alarmingly under his weight.

José reached the spot and struck viciously with his weapon, but the blow fell short, and in a trice Billy had dived into the stream.

José roared a curse as my brother's body disappeared beneath the water. Then, his rage and lust of murder whetted by failure, he turned on me.

I was still kneeling by the ready anchor, six feet from him. Billy's voice came to me:

"Overboard with you, Jack—quick!"
But ere I could obey, I saw that which
Billy had not seen, which José never
knew. I saw the boom which Billy had
had no time to make fast swinging down

on us. The wind drove it, the leap of

the boat urged it on.

José stood poised for a spring on me. Behind him the hurrying boom darted forward. He could not see it—he thought only of murder. And while the lust to kill was on him, the swinging wood crashed into the back of his head.

He shot forward under the fatal blow, and without a cry fell headlong into the river.

Billy from the other side of the schooner was unable to see clearly, and imagined that José had hurled himself on me. 'He therefore clambered out of the water into the boat, and rushed toward me to aid in the fight.

Then he stopped short in astonish-

ment.

"Where is he?" my brother cried.

And I, remembering the outlaw's words concerning Sanchez, answered simply:

"In hell."

\* \* \* \* \*

Billy stood by me as I crouched in the bows, and together we stared long and curiously at the tumbling waves of the stream.

Mechanically, I had let slip the anchor after José's vanishing, and now the boat swung to and fro in an arc of the cable's length about the spot where the brigand had disappeared. We watched long—longer than there was any need—but nothing rewarded our vigil.

Stunned by the blow, José had sunk like a log, never to rise in life. At last my brother and I looked into each other's eyes. José's soul had passed, and that without our soiling ourselves with his blood.

We were a little solemn with the suddenness and awe of death, but beyond measure we were glad that this man's days of infamy were at an end.

"And now," I said to Billy, "let's be

off to find the money."

We found provisions a plenty in the schooner, and of these we made two packs as large as we thought prudent, which we were able to cast on shore from the boat. Then we dropped into the water, and, once more on land, gathered up our supplies and set forth.

It was a simple matter to find our way, for we had only to follow up the course of the stream. But it was a long and tiresome tramp. We hurried to the limit of our strength, but with all our efforts it was dark when at last we reached the cove where we had first embarked, and there we camped for the

Our clothes had dried during the long march, and now, after a hearty meal, we slept the sleep of exhaustion. In the morning, however, we found ourselves greatly refreshed, and we set out with good heart for the journey back into the barranca. So, as the darkness of another night deepened, we came to that part of the cañon in which we had been captured, and camped for the night in José's hut.

I was the first to awake in the morning, and I got up and crawled out of the hut without disturbing Billy. I wished to be alone for a little while, to think over the difficulties that were still before us. For always there ran in my head the mysterious "N. 17 Sul 12."

As yet, I had been unable to make any conjecture as to the meaning of the characters beyond that suggested on our first study of them. I hoped, however, that here on the spot something might give me a hint that would help us to a solution.

Therefore I stared all about, trying vainly to draw inspiration from the

I had remained thus absorbed in useless meditation for a half-hour or more, and was just turning away in despair to call Billy, when my eyes chanced to fall on three of the pumice bubbles or domes, which stood in line rather close together, some way to the north of that which formed the hut wherein we had spent the night.

On the instant I was thrilled with a great hope. I let my gaze wander over the whole visible floor of the barranca, and found to my joy that, while the domes were carelessly scattered here and there in seeming confusion, they did, nevertheless, form a most irregular line running north and south.

At once, without waiting for Billy, I set out toward the north, counting the domes as I went, making the hut of José

the first. As I counted on, I became more and more certain that I was finally on the right track, for now that I had reached fifteen I found myself close to the point where we had lost José when he disappeared with the bundle. And there were two more domes just beyond.

I passed these and found myself close to the west wall of the barranca, at a point I knew to be about that where José had been while out of our sight. For a moment I could make no guess as to the exact whereabouts of the hiding-place, but I knew it must be close at hand. The careful search must come later, with Billy.

Elated and eager I returned to the hut to tell my brother of my discovery

and to enlist his aid.

An hour afterward the two of us reached the seventeenth dome to the north.

"N. 17," Billy quoted, looking about him. "By Jove, Jack, I believe your theory is the right one. Now, what the deuce does Sul 12 mean?"

"Let's not bother about that until we have to," I answered. "We must go ahead and hunt all about here. We may be able to find the place without getting any explanation of the secret. Come on."

So we set to work. Through all the forenoon we searched indefatigably. We burrowed among the stones, and investigated every crack, but we came on nothing more interesting than many creeping things that fled at our approach.

It was something after eleven when

I at last called a halt.

We had brought our provisions for a meal with us, and we now went close to the west wall where a spring of clear water trickled and prepared to refresh ourselves. It was pleasantly cool here in the depths of the earth, for the walls were so high that the sun did not shine into the *barranca* until nearly at its zenith.

At this hour it shone on the west wall high above our heads, but it would be a considerable time before it crept down to the floor of the *barranca*.

"The sun gets down to the floor of the barranca just about noon," I said idly,

Billy started as if struck.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed. "And I never thought of it before. What a fool!"

"Eh?" I said, puzzled by his words

and manner.

"Why, don't you see? Sul—that's what we called it. But I remember just how it looked. That 'u' wasn't written carefully. The top of the side lines didn't turn out any. It was like a half-circle. Jack, don't you understand? It wasn't 'u' at all. It was meant for an 'o.'"

"An 'o,'" I repeated feebly.

"Yes," Billy replied with animation, "an 'o.' It should read Sol—that means sun."

"And the 12 means noon," I burst forth in a sudden grasping of the truth.

"That's it," Billy agreed. "The hiding-place is somewhere around dome number seventeen at a point where the sunlight falls at twelve o'clock."

"And it's close on twelve now," I ex-

claimed. "We must see."

"But the light is 'way above our heads on the cliff still," Billy declared, with an air suddenly turned crestfallen.

"Well, we must note its course down the cliff and afterward," I responded,

"and search the whole track."

We fell silent and eagerly watched the sun as it crept slowly down the wall of stone before us. It was thirty feet above us, twenty-nine, twenty-eight, and now hardly twenty-five—soon twenty.

It was still ten feet at least above the floor of the *barranca* when my eye was caught by a slight break in the rock. My desire to be about the search was so great that I seized on this as a pretext.

"It's now past twelve," I said to Billy, "and time to be up and doing. I think the sun has fallen a little behind schedule since José made his mémorandum. But here goes. The first place to explore is that tiny shelf with a hole back of it where the sun is shining. Do you see it?"

"I see it," Billy replied. Then he

whistled. "I wonder-"

"Give me a back," I said, rising and going to the wall. Billy bowed himself close by the precipice, with his hands on his knees. Holding on by the uneven bits of stone, I got on his shoulders and stood erect.

I could easily reach the niche where the sunlight streamed, and I thrust my hand within it. My fingers touched a parcel, and I brought it forth. It was a small package wrapped in brown paper.

"Find anything?" Billy demanded.

"Yes, I have something," I replied

doubtfully.

"Then for Heaven's sake get down, and let's have a look at it. You're heavy."

I scrambled down obediently. Once on the ground I tore off the wrappings. while Billy looked on in anxious silence.

The last bit of cover fell. In my hand lay a great sheaf of bank-notes-

American money.

Billy snatched the heap from my hand, very rudely, and began counting silently. As he finished, he looked up at me with a radiant smile, and said softly:

"One hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It's all here, Jack."

"Surely the luck has turned." I an-

swered.

## AN EXPENSIVE BOARDER.

THE END.

BY C. LANGTON CLARKE.

Author of "A Domestic Treasure," "Cousin Almira's Baby," etc.

In which Mr. Scales seeks to be relieved of an incubus, with an outcome that was not down on the cards.

COUSIN FRED has been here," said Mrs. George Scales, as she met her husband in the hall on his return from the office. "He was awfully sorry not to see you, but he had to catch the five-o'clock train for New York."

Mr. Scales, who was hanging up his

hat, turned round sharply.

"What does he want now?" he de-

manded, with some asperity.

"He doesn't want anything," Mrs. Scales replied, with spirit. "He came to see me, and you, too, I suppose, if you had come home to lunch, as usual. I do wish, George, you wouldn't be quite so ready to pick holes in my relations. I know Fred has been a little wild and careless, but he is doing ever so much better now. He told me he made quite a lot of money last week."

"What was the name of the horse?"

Mr. Scales asked grimly.

"What a nasty spirit you do show sometimes, George," his wife replied. "It wasn't a horse at all, or anything of that kind. Fred told me positively that he had given up racing and betting and card-playing. He hates the very sight of a card, he says, and has burned all his dope, whatever that is. He is traveling now for the Gold-something-or-other Company."

"Bricks?" suggested Mr. Scales.

"No-o," replied Mrs. Scales simply. "I can't recall the name. At any rate, he is doing very well. He is getting lots of orders, and thinks of setting up in business for himself. He said perhaps you might like to go in with him.

Mr. Scales laughed sardonically.

"Not for mine," he answered. "A partnership with Master Fred Roxley would be just a trifle too strenuous. I think I'll stick to real estate. How long was he here?"

"He came just before lunch," replied Mrs. Scales, "and he left at four

o'clock."

"Four hours," commented the husband; "and in all that time he didn't ask you to do anything for him?"

"Not in the way you mean, George, with your horrid suspicions," replied the wife. "He did ask me to do something, and very glad I was to be able to do it. He begged me to take charge of something for him for a week or ten days. He said he couldn't take him to New York, because the people in the hotel wouldn't let him in.'

"Him?" cried Mr. Scales.

do you mean by him—Fred?"

"No," replied Mrs. Scales; "Jim." Mr. Scales sat down suddenly.

"You don't mean to tell me," he said in a trembling voice, "that you have taken charge of a child—or a baby?" he added, with a shudder of recollection.

Mrs. Scales laughed.

"Not quite so bad as that," she said.
"Fancy Fred traveling with a baby!
Why, he dislikes them even more than
you do. Come along and I'll introduce
you to Jim. He's in the breakfastroom."

She led the way, and throwing open the door, pointed to a corner of the room.

"That's Jim," she said, smiling.

Standing beside a heavy table, to the leg of which he was attached by a stout chain, was a huge bulldog, pure white, with the exception of a black-and-tan patch over one eye, which gave it the appearance of having been discolored in a fight.

His lower jaw, projecting like the ram of a man-of-war, disclosed several dirty and distorted teeth, above which appeared the tip of a little pink tongue. With his kinky tail and stout, bandy legs he was as truculent-looking an animal as could well be conceived, an additionally sinister expression being imparted by a slight obliquity of vision.

Utterly at a loss for words, Mr. Scales gazed on the visitor with every mani-

festation of abhorrence.

"You can't think," continued Mrs. Scales brightly, "what an intelligent fellow he is. He made friends with me at once. Fred regularly introduced me to him. He said: 'Now, Jim, this is your mistress for a week, and you must take good care of her,' and do you know, the dear fellow actually came up and licked my hands. Didn't, you, old boy?"

The scrubby tail wriggled spasmodically, and a lumbering movement of the fore legs seemed to express assent.

"Why didn't you telephone me," demanded Mr. Scales, "so that I could get home in time?"

"In time for what?" asked the wife.
"In time to get an introduction, too."

"In time to get an introduction, too," replied the husband. "I'm not particularly fond of having my hands licked by a dog, but I should prefer that to having my legs bitten."

having my legs bitten."
"Don't be so childish, George,"
remonstrated Mrs. Scales. "Jim never

bites. He has only bitten three people in his life, and one of them was Fred himself. Fred accidentally stepped on his toe, and before Jim knew what he was doing he had caught him by the leg. It took ever so long to get him off. Fred says bulldogs don't think very quickly, but Jim was awfully sorry when he realized what he had done. It was quite pathetic to see his repentance."

"There'll be plenty of pathos if that brute catches me by the leg," said Mr. Scales hotly, "only he won't have much time to do the repentance act. I can't think how you could be so foolish. Where on earth are we going to keep him? We can't turn this room into a

dog-kennel."

"He has been accustomed to sleep in Fred's bedroom," suggested Mrs.

Scales tentatively.

"You don't suppose he's going to sleep in our room?" shouted Mr. Scales. "I think I see myself getting out of bed in the night with that beast in the room. I would as soon step on an alligator."

Mrs. Scales shrugged her shoulders. "Very well," she said resignedly. "If you are such a coward, I suppose the poor dog will have to sleep in here. And now I am going to give you an introduction. Perhaps you had better sit down. And do try not to look so scared. Dogs don't like people who are afraid of them."

Mr. Scales took a chair, and assumed the conventionally pleasant expression of a man having his photograph taken, while Mrs. Scales, kneeling beside the dog, stroked his massive head.

"Jim," she said, "that is your master

for a week. Do you understand?"

Apparently, the dog did not, for he devoted all his energies to an attempt to lick Mrs. Scales's face.

"Stupid!" said the lady, giving him a sharp little pat. "That is your master,

there. Look!"

She pointed to Mr. Scales, and Jim fixed a stern eye on him.

"Don't do that," expostulated Mr. Scales sharply. "Don't point at me like that. He thinks you are sicking him on."

"Stuff!" replied the wife. "That's only his natural expression. Now I'm going to unfasten the chain."

Before her husband could remonstrate,

she had unhooked the swivel, and Mr. Scales experienced all the agonies of apprehension of the early Christian martyr when the lions entered the arena.

With one finger hooked lightly in the ring of his collar, Mrs. Scales led Jim up to her husband, and permitted him several satisfying sniffs at the latter's legs.

"Put your hands where he can lick them," she commanded. "Then he will

make friends."

Mr. Scales, with little nervous chills running up and down his spine, obediently laid his hands on his knees.

Jim transferred his attentions from Mr. Scales's legs to his fingers, but failed to make the advances which Mrs. Scales expected.

"It's that horrible tar-soap you will insist on using," she said. "You can't expect a dog to enjoy the taste of tar. Can't you go and wash it off?"

"And rub some butter on instead, I suppose," Mr. Scales returned sarcastically. "No, thank you. If Bill Sykes, here, can't make friends without licking my hands we'll have to let it go at that."

The sound of the dinner-gong put an end to further argument, and husband and wife proceeded to the dining-room, the third member of the party waddling behind, with his gaze focused on Mr. Scales's calves.

During the meal Mr. Scales contrived, through the medium of several large pieces of steak, to establish relations which, if not absolutely friendly, were at least not hostile, and by the time the evening was well advanced was able to move about without the paralyzing feeling that at any moment those formidable teeth might be fixed in some portion of his anatomy.

When bedtime came Jim was accommodated with several large and downy cushions in a corner of the breakfast-room, the husband turning a resolutely deaf ear to his wife's hints that the poor fellow would feel lonely.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Scales had just fallen into his first refreshing slumber, when he was awakened by a long-drawn howl, which seemed to come from under the bed.

"What the mischief's that?" he asked,

starting up, and temporarily oblivious of his unwelcome guest.

"Jim, I suppose," responded his wife sleepily. "I told you he would feel lonesome, but you wouldn't listen. You'd better go down and make him keep quiet."

"Make him keep quiet?" echoed Mr. Scales indignantly. "How on earth am

I to do that?"

"Give him a few good hard slaps," suggested Mrs. Scales, in the same somnolent tone. "Please don't talk so

much; I want to go to sleep."

Mr. Scales, who would as readily have entered a cage of ravening tigers as ventured his person inside the breakfast-room while occupied by its present tenant, resigned himself to the inevitable. He was a light sleeper, and the remainder of his rest was broken by the protesting yowls of the imprisoned dog and a series of terrifying dreams in which the animal took a leading part.

Next morning Jim, eager for human society after his solitary confinement, greeted his host in a comparatively friendly fashion. A few pieces of fish, administered at breakfast, still further cemented the alliance, and when Mr. Scales left for his office the animal graciously accompanied him to the front door.

Unfortunately, at the moment Mr. Scales opened the door a large Persian cat, the cherished pet of a maiden lady who lived two doors away, was sunning herself contentedly on the steps.

There was a short, grunting bark; the hurtling of a heavy body against Mr. Scales's legs, almost throwing him off his balance; a strangled squall, and the next moment a hundred-dollar cat was lying dead on the stoop, while Jim, licking his lips with infinite relish, was slowly lumbering back into the house.

Appalled by the suddenness and enormity of the tragedy, Mr. Scales stood, for a few seconds, staring at the lifeless bundle of fur. Then rallying his scattered faculties, he hurriedly seized it by the tail, and dragged it into the vestibule.

He carried it at arm's length up-stairs, closely followed by the delighted Jim, and presented the thing to the horrified gaze of his wife.

"Look what your precious dog has

done now," he said. "Miss Merry-

weather's prize cat!"

"Take it away!" shrieked Mrs. Scales. "Take it away at once! What did you bring the horrid thing in here for? Oh, you bad, wicked dog!" and she shook her finger at the impatient culprit. "It's all your fault, George. You had no business to open the door so carelessly. Jim might have run away."

"No such luck," returned Mr. Scales grimly. "If I thought he'd do that I would leave every door in the house open. The question is—what's to be done about this cat? Miss Merryweather

will be frantic."

"Was any one watching?" Mrs.

Scales inquired.

"Not a soul," replied her husband.
"There was nobody near, and the cat hardly made a sound. I lost no time in getting the poor thing into the house,

you may be sure."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Scales, in a greatly relieved tone, "I don't see that it really matters so very much. Of course, I'm awfully sorry for the poor cat and Miss Merryweather, but I don't see how we can be held responsible. Jim isn't our dog, you know."

"I hope Miss Merryweather will appreciate the distinction," Mr. Scales re-

marked bitterly.

"There is no reason why she should know anything about it," Mrs. Scales replied sharply. "It would be most unkind to tell her. Think what her feelings would be! Such a dreadful death!"

Mr. Scales, still holding the cat by the tail, stared at his wife in silent amaze.

"What you had better do, George," that lady continued, "is to put the body in the cellar, and to-night, when it is dark, you can slip out and bury it in the back garden. Miss Merryweather is sure to think it has been stolen, and as a valuable cat like that would be well taken care of, she will not feel so badly about it. Really, George, it's far the most Christianlike way to settle it."

"And supposing she asks whether we have seen it?" Mr. Scales hazarded.

"Oh, well," replied Mrs. Scales easily, "you can say that when you went out of the house to go to your office you saw it sitting on the stoop. That would be the truth."

With another long stare, Mr. Scales turned speechlessly away, and bearing his burden to the cellar, laid it on a remote shelf. Then, having first ascertained that Jim was safe up-stairs, he departed for his office, his mind a whirl of conflicting emotions.

Late that same night, Mr. Scales, bearing a spade and a soap-box coffin, slipped out into the garden, and, with many uneasy glances over his shoulder, consigned the body of the cat to the tomb. He realized to the full the sensations of a murderer disposing of his victim, and it was a positive relief to get back into the well-lighted house.

His one consolation was the attitude of friendliness assumed by Jim, who evidently regarded his host as a confederate in crime and treated him with

marked cordiality.

The following evening Mr. and Mrs. Scales were seated in the study, the former busy with his paper and the latter engaged in some sewing, when the wife broke a long silence by saying:

"Miss Merryweather was in to-day

about her cat."

"Oh!" said Mr. Scales. "And what did you tell her?"

"Just what you told me to say," re-

plied Mrs. Scales placidly.

Mr. Scales looked hard at his wife, and was about to demand further explanations, but thought better of it.

"Where's Jim?" he inquired.

"In the breakfast-room, I fancy," Mrs. Scales replied. "He went in there after dinner and curled up on his cushions. Shall I call him?"

"I guess we can worry along without his society," said Mr. Scales. "So long as he is out of mischief, I don't care where he is. By the way, I expect Butterworth may drop round to-night. He is just back from New York."

The words were hardly out of Mr. Scales's mouth when the door-bell was rung sharply, and a moment later a step

resounded in the hall.

"I'll bet that's Butterworth now," he added. "He didn't wait for Emma to open the door. Knows he's always welcome. Yes, that's his step, for a hundred. He's coming up."

There was no doubt that the person who had just entered the house was com-

ing up. Mr. Scales had hardly finished speaking when there came the sound of scrambling feet ascending the stairs several steps at a time, followed by a swift

rush along the passage.

The door was dashed open, and a short, stout man, very much out of breath, precipitated himself into the room, and closing the door again with great violence, flung himself against it. At the same moment a heavy body was heard to impinge on the lower panels.

Mr. and Mrs. Scales rose simultaneously, in consternation at this sudden

irruption.

"Good Lord! Butterworth!" ejaculated the former. "What on earth is

the matter?"

"Matter?" shouted Mr. Butterworth as loudly as his breathless condition would permit. "What sort of a welcome is this in a friend's house? I walked right in, to save time and trouble, and hardly had I put my foot on the first step when I heard a queer noise behind me-a sort of grunting noise. I looked back, and there, coming full tilt out of that little side room, was the most awfullooking beast I ever saw. If he hadn't slithered along and upset in trying to turn on that waxed floor, he'd have had me sure. I heard his teeth clash together like a crocodile's as I got through the door. He only missed me by a few

"Why, Mr. Butterworth," said Mrs. Scales, laughing, "that was only Jim. He's the friendliest dog-isn't he, George? If you had only stood quite still, I'm sure he wouldn't have hurt you."

Mr. Butterworth, who was clinging to · the handle of the door with both hands, as if he feared it might be forced open, snorted in reply.

"George was just as foolish about him at first," Mrs. Scales continued, "and now he would hate to part with

him-wouldn't you, George?"

"I think I could manage to survive it," responded Mr. Scales dryly. "Sit down, Butterworth, and let go of that door-handle. Jim is a highly intelligent animal, but hardly equal to turning it."

Mr. Butterworth, feeling that he had not presented himself in a very heroic light, complied rather sulkily, and after

a few precautionary maneuvers Jim was brought into the room and formally introduced. He seemed much disappointed at finding his expected prev established as a friend of the family, and while he accepted him as such, evidently did so with a mental reservation.

"Why don't you lose the brute?" Mr. Butterworth asked, when the two men were alone and Mr. Scales had confided his detestation of the animal.

"I tried to this morning," replied the other, "but it was no go. I opened the back gate and let him run out in the lane, hoping to see the last of him, but not a bit of it. Back he came in five minutes. He knows when he's well off. My wife spoils him. I wish some one would steal him."

"Get him stolen, then," Mr. Butterworth suggested. "Nothing easier. know a man who will be delighted to do it for a five-spot. It's his trade. Your wife needn't know anything about it. You can console her by telling her that a dog like that is sure of a good home.'

Mr. Scales, recalling his wife's sophistries on the subject of Miss Merryweather's cat, chuckled audibly, and a low-voiced colloguy ensued, in the course of which the conspirators laid down the

general outlines of the plot.

"I'll drop him a line to call at your office at eleven, to-morrow," Mr. Butterworth said, as he rose to take his departure. "Mixey's one of the biggest rascals unhung, but he's useful at times. And as for you," he added, shaking his fist stealthily at the unconscious Iim, "I'll teach you to chase a gentleman upstairs like a burglar."

Precisely at eleven o'clock, the following morning, Mr. Scales's office-boy ushered into his master's private sanctum one of the most disreputable-looking characters that gentleman had ever beheld. He wore a faded brown rain-coat, several sizes too large for him, and his most noticeable features were a carminecolored nose and one watery gray eye, which wandered over the room and Mr. Scales's person in a most disconcerting

"Your name is Mixey?" Mr. Scales inquired, after motioning his visitor to the oldest chair in the office.

The other nodded.

"That's the name my friends know me by," he replied, in a voice raucous from much whisky-and-water. "My proper name is Jonathan Mimbury."

"Oh!" said Mr. Scales, with an uncomfortable feeling that he had suffered a rebuke for undue familiarity. "Mr. Butterworth spoke to me about vou."

"Ah!" said Mr. Mimbury. "He's a real good friend, Mr. Butterworth is, and any friends of his is also friends of mine."

Mr. Scales could not help wondering whether he would in future be classed by his villainous-looking visitor among his intimates.

"I want you to steal a dog for me," he said, coming to the point at once.

Mr. Mimbury, who was accustomed to having delicate subjects approached in a more roundabout fashion, looked shocked.

more roundabout fashion, looked shocked.
"Steal a dog, sir?" he repeated, in pained surprise. "That's a matter of jail—or maybe penitentiary. Besides, it's sinful."

"There's no question of penitentiary in this case," Mr. Scales replied reassuringly. "It's my own dog—at least, it belongs to a relation of mine, which comes to the same thing."

Mr. Mimbury looked dubious.

"I got into trouble once," he said, "Through stea—through having a dog follow me. It belonged to a cousin of the gentleman as wanted it, and the fuss he made over it you'd hardly believe. He actually wanted to have us both jailed."

Mr. Scales impatiently waved aside this precedent as by no means analogous, and in a few words made his visitor acquainted with the facts of the case. Mr. Mimbury's expression at once changed from perplexity and reproach to pleased

acquiescence.

"That's easy enough," he said. "You let him out for a bit of a run in the lane when you go home for lunch, and I'll be there with a little something in my pocket that I know the secret of. That dog'd follow me anywhere—into a church, even."

Impressed by his visitor's confidence in his own powers, Mr. Scales handed over a five-dollar bill.

"Of course, you keep the dog," he

said. "And mind—not a word to any one about this. I particularly don't want my wife to know."

Mr. Mimbury winked with his blind eye in a ghastly fashion and took his departure, faithfully promising to be on hand at the time appointed.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Mr. Scales returned home for luncheon he met, descending the steps of his house, an austere-looking female with a cold gray eye whose garments seemed to have been hewn out of a block of wood.

"Good morning, Miss Merryweather," said Mr. Scales, lifting his hat. "I was sorry to hear that you had lost your cat."

Miss Merryweather received her neighbor's salutation with marked frigidity.

"I did lose it, Mr. Scales," she said, articulating her words with great distinctness. "But I have recovered it."

Mr. Scales stared at her open-mouthed. "Recovered it?" he repeated faintly.

"No wonder you look surprised," the lady continued, "particularly after the assurances I received from Mrs. Scales that neither she nor you knew anything of its disappearance."

"Will you kindly explain?" Mr. Scales interrupted, with a poor attempt

at dignity.

"There is very little to explain, Mr. Scales," Miss Merryweather replied. "This morning I was looking out of one of my rear windows, when I noticed a dog—a most disreputable-looking dog, I must say—digging furiously in a corner of your garden. I watched him with some little curiosity, wondering what he could be so busy about. My interest was soon rewarded. Out of the hole which he had dug he dragged the body"—Miss Merryweather's voice trembled, but she mastered her emotion—"the body, Mr. Scales, of my poor cat."

"Good Heavens, Miss Merry-weather!" Mr. Scales cried, in admirably counterfeited surprise and indignation. "That miserable dog! We are taking charge of him for a few days to oblige Mrs. Scales's cousin. He must have caught your cat in the garden and killed and buried it. Extraordinary what a mania dogs seem to have for

burying things."

Miss Merryweather sniffed three times at solemn intervals.

"I am not well acquainted with the habits of dogs, Mr. Scales," she said, "but I have yet to learn that they take the trouble to coffin the remains of their victims before interring them."

Mr. Scales opened his mouth to reply,

but words failed him.

"I took the liberty," Miss Merryweather continued, "as soon as the fierce dog had gone back into the house, of entering your garden by the side gate, to assure myself that it was indeed the body of my poor cat. I looked into the grave from which it had been taken, and judge of my surprise when I saw the gnawed and broken fragments of the box-a soap-box, if I am not mistakenin which it had been buried. I beg your pardon?"

"I did not speak," said the hapless

Mr. Scales.

"Just as well, perhaps," replied the lady. "I have only this to say: At the last cat show, my cat was valued by an expert at the exceedingly conservative sum of one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Unless I receive that amount by next Monday, I shall consult my lawyers. Our acquaintance, of course, ends from this minute."

She swept haughtily past, without waiting for a reply, and Mr. Scales, angry and humiliated, went into the

house, to find his wife in tears.

"Why in the name of goodness, George, didn't you bury that beast of a cat deeper?" she cried reproachfully. "You always leave things half done. You don't know what horrible things Miss Merryweather has been saying. She is a regular cat herself. She as good as told me I was a liar."

"What did you tell her when she first asked about the cat?" demanded the hus-

"I told her I didn't know anything about it," Mrs. Scales replied defiantly.

"Well, in that case-" began Mr.

Scales, but thought better of it.

"Oh, well," he resumed, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "I suppose there's nothing for it but to pay and look pleasant. Miss Merryweather could make things rather nasty for us. Where's that confounded dog?"

"In the kitchen with Emma," Mrs. Scales replied, "and there's not the

slightest use in beating him."

"Beating him?" cried the husband. "Do you think I'm tired of life? I'm going to try moral suasion. I shall take him out in the garden, beside the grave, and read him a little lecture."

Ignoring his wife's petulant "I do wish you wouldn't try to be funny. George," Mr. Scales repaired to the garden, followed by Jim. A glance at the ragged grave confirmed his resolution. and gently opening the back gate, he watched the dog waddling along the lane, at the far end of which could be descried the lurking figure of Mr. Mimbury.

Harmonious relations between dog and dog-stealer were soon established, and having waited until the two figures were out of sight, Mr. Scales, with a sigh of relief, returned to the house.

Thrice that afternoon did his office telephone convey the information that Jim had not returned, and Mr. Scales, invoking blessings on the heads of Mr. Butterworth and Mixey, hypocritically expressed his concern.

The third time, Mrs. Scales informed him that she intended to insert an advertisement in the Lost and Found column of the morning paper, and Mr. Scales, who was busy with a likely customer, promptly assented.

"How much reward should I offer?"

Mrs. Scales asked.

"Anything you like," the husband replied impatiently. "It doesn't matter."

"It matters a great deal," protested the wife. "I must get Jim back, but I won't want to pay too much. Shall I make it twenty dollars?"

"All right," said Mr. Scales, who felt secure in his treachery. " Make it twenty

-or twenty-five, if you like."

He was not sorry, in the presence of an impressionable customer, to be able to adopt an air of free-handedness with money at so little cost.

He gave no more attention to the subject until the evening, when Mrs. Scales informed him that she had taken his advice and made the reward twenty-five dollars.

She pointed out the advertisement with some pride, at breakfast, and insisted on his leaving the amount of the reward. Mr. Scales, chuckling inwardly, handed it over, and perfidiously expressed the hope that Jim might be brought back safe and sound.

"Far too valuable a dog to lose," he said. "Or for Mixey to part with, once he has his claws on him," he added under

his breath.

Mr. Butterworth dropped into Mr. Scales's office in the course of the morning, and to him the latter related the success of the conspiracy.

"The brute won't bother me any more," he said complacently.

have a great head, Butterworth."

"But I see you've advertised for him," the other remarked, in some perplexity.

"Oh, that was my wife's doing," replied Mr. Scales airily. "I couldn't well prevent it without arousing suspicions, and it only amounts to the cost of the ad. Come home to lunch, and help me to face the lamentations."

There were no lamentations, however, when the two men arrived. On the contrary, Mrs. Scales's face, as she met them in the hall, was radiant.

"I've got two pleasant surprises for you, George," she cried. "I'll give you

three guesses."

Mr. Scales laughingly shook his head.

"Give it up," he said.
"First and foremost," said Mrs. Scales, emphasizing the importance of her news with a forefinger, "Jim's

"What?" cried Mr. Scales, aghast. "Tim back? How on earth did he get

"He didn't get back," replied Mrs. Scales, laughing happily. "He was brought back by the queerest old man, with one eye, who said he found him wandering about at the other end of the city. He told me such a pathetic story. It seems he has been out of work for ever so long, and his wife and children were nearly starving. He almost cried when I paid him the reward. I want you to try and do something for him, George."

"You bet I will!" assented George, with so much intensity that his wife stared at him. "The infernal scoun-

drel!"

Mrs. Scales drew herself up.

"I know the man by your description," continued Mr. Scales, forgetting that his wife had only mentioned the loss of an eve. "I have heard of him through Butterworth, who is a friend of his." He darted an indignant look at his companion, whose countenance wore a most insufferable grin. "Mr. Butterworth has some very peculiar friends. The man never had a wife or family. He is a rascally professional thief and dog-stealer."

Mrs. Scales sniffed incredulously.

"You haven't asked me what the second surprise is," she said.

"Go ahead," urged Mr. Scales; "but

break it gently, please."

"I had a letter from Fred this morning," continued his wife, her spirits noticeably dampened by her husband's unresponsiveness. "He writes that he has to go on to New Orleans on business, and will not return this way."

"Come, that's a piece of good news,

anyhow," said Mr. Scales.

Mrs. Scales bit her lip in indignation.

"Of course, you know he owes you some money," she said.

"I believe I have a faint recollection of that fact," Mr. Scales replied grimly, "but I can refresh my memory by a look at my check-book."

"How thoroughly nasty you are, George," protested Mrs. Scales. "You are most unjust to Fred at the very time he is trying to repay you for your kindness. He wants you to keep Jim for your very own."

"Does he, indeed?" Mr. Scales observed, with bitter sarcasm. "Very kind

of him, I'm sure."

"Fred says," Mrs. Scales went on, in a cold voice, "that Jim is worth three hundred dollars if he is worth a cent. He mentions the name of some man who will give you two hundred and fifty at once, but he thinks you ought to get more without any trouble."

Mr. Scales's heavily beclouded coun-

tenance brightened at once.

"Come, come," he said cheerfully. "Master Fred isn't such a bad fellow after all. I confess I don't know much about dogs. I'd no idea Jim was so valuable. Where is he? Let's go and have a look at the gold-mine."

"He's in the garden," replied Mrs.

Scales, delighted at her husband's altered manner. "I put him there as soon as the man brought him back. He said it was hardly safe to have him in the house until you came home, as no one could tell where he had been, and he might have disease germs about him. He advised that you should wash him at once with disinfecting soap. Really, George, I'm sure you do the man an injustice. He was most kind and thoughtful."

Without replying, Mr. Scales hurried out to the garden, followed by his wife and friend.

He called, he whistled, but there was no response, and a brief investigation of all possible places of concealment showed that Jim had vanished.

"It's Miss Merryweather," said Mrs. Scales fiercely. "She has made away with Jim out of revenge for her cat."

"Nonsense!" retorted Mr. Scales indignantly. "It's easy to see how he got out. You left this back gate open."

"I didn't," replied Mrs. Scales, with equal heat. "I saw to it myself that every gate was closed."

Mr. Butterworth pointed to a small piece of stick which had been thrust into the latch from the outside and still hung there.

"Mixey," he said. "So that's why he advised leaving the dog in the garden. He got the reward, and then he sneaked the dog again. By gad, he's a slick one."

Mr. Scales, unconscious, in his wo, of

the dominant note of admiration in his friend's voice, dropped on a rustic bench which stood convenient.

"A hundred and twenty-five dollars for a dead Persian cat," he said hopelessly. "Thirty—I should say twenty-five—dollars put right into the pocket of the biggest scoundrel unhung. All this trouble and worry, and now three hundred dollars gone in a bunch! Of all the infernal tangles! And I told the villain he might keep the dog," he added, in a voice which he took care should not reach the ears of his wife.

"If you know the man," said Mrs. Scales, with some contempt, "you can catch him easily enough."

"If I know the man," said Mr. Butterworth, "you won't do anything of the kind."

And Mr. Butterworth was right.

Of Mixey and Jim not a trace could be found. They had vanished as utterly as if the earth had swallowed them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two years later, Mr. Scales learned indirectly of a curious phenomenon in connection with a bulldog. A fancier had purchased one, almost entirely black, from a one-eyed rover. Three months later, the animal turned a pale green, and thence passed through shades of orange and canary-yellow to pure white.

From which Mr. Scales concluded that Mr. Mimbury had invested part of his ill-gotten gains in a bottle of hair-dye.

## WHEN SUSPICION STRUCK HARD.

BY STEPHEN BRANDISH,

Author of "At the Mercy of the Unseen."

A victim of circumstantial evidence, and his thrilling adventures in his pursuit of the man he felt to be really guilty.

### CHAPTER I.

OPINIONS AND A TROLLEY-CAR.

THE Bates girls, white and fluffy in their summer finery, had just acquired two pounds of the most expensive and indigestible variety of chocolates, neatly boxed by the manufacturer, and now enveloped in the pink paper

and tied with the gold twine which were reserved exclusively for the candycounter.

Now, after laying a foundation for future discomfort by the assimilation of ice-cream soda, they fluttered and giggled their way out into the electric light of Main Street again; and Albert Radford, Ph.G., gazed meditatively after them as he deposited the two-dollar bill in the cash-register.

Those two young women represented the very best and most lucrative trade in Bondville—and it was all Radford's!

From the first evening that he had switched on the lights behind the globes of colored water, Radford's Drug Emporium and Radford himself had enjoyed unvarying prosperity. That was two years ago, and hardly a week but had seen the young man making his deposit in the Bondville Savings Institution.

It was great! It seemed to Radford a record. It had confirmed in his mind the original conviction that if a hustling druggist start the right sort of up-to-date store in the right sort of hustling Middle West town the rest was easy.

He sighed contentedly and pushed in

the drawer of the register.

Then he returned slowly to the rear of the store and walked again behind

the prescription-counter.

Some of his content evanesced thereupon, for in the lounging-chair reclined one of the most depressed-appearing mortals conceivable. His head was in his hands; it nodded occasionally, in a

startingly gloomy fashion.

This chanced to be Robert Radford, brother of the druggist and a man of much worry. He was owner, editor, and general utility man of Bondville's smaller newspaper, the *Morning News*. By all the canons of his profession, he should at that moment have been camped in the editorial office, reading proof, clipping exchanges, and generally aiding the paper to appear, next morning.

He would have none of it to-night. The very young and very inexpensive college man who aided him might do his best—and, to quote Robert exactly, he didn't care a continental cuss whether the devilish sheet came out next morn-

ing or not.

"Who was that, Bert?" he asked monotonously.

"Nellie Bates and her sister."

"Bought a ton of candy, fifteen dollars' worth of the latest toilet specialties, and a gallon of perfume, I suppose?"

"Not quite as bad as that, Bob," the druggist laughed.

"Well, they bought more than most people, anyway, and they paid cash for it!" the editor returned irritably. "What beastly good luck you do have!"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well, I do! Look here!" Robert faced him challengingly. "Haven't I hustled as hard as you have in the three or four years since we struck this town?"

"Of course you have, but ---"

"But! That's just the trouble! Why the devil is it that you're saddled with a gold-mine drug-store, while I've got the worst dead horse on my shoulders that ever happened in the history of journalism?"

"Well, it's different, you see," the

druggist hazarded inanely.

"Different! Yes, it is different.

He stared gloomily at the linoleum on the floor. Albert Radford rather wished that another customer would appear. That linoleum had cost two dollars a yard, and the sight of it usually aggravated Robert's blacker moods—possibly because the editorial sanctum had never graduated beyond its original forty-nine-cent oilcloth.

"Different!" the editor pursued, and his teeth bared savagely. "Different!"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about it, Bob," the druggist murmured soothingly. "It might have been just the other way around, you know."

other way around, you know."

"But it wasn't." He scowled at the linoleum again and looked up suddenly. "Say, Bert, do you know how much longer the Bondville Morning News has

to live?"

" Er-no."

"One week! Just one little week—seven days—six editions—and one of the most intellectual dailies in the West will have been gathered to its fathers! Why, there's a mortgage on every individual chunk of type in the office! I pawned the shears and the waste-basket last week, and we've been using penknives on the exchanges since then. Brady swore this afternoon that after Monday he'd not set another stick unless he saw something like real money."

"But you're more than welcome, my

dear boy---"

"Bert, I don't want to borrow money—far less from you than from any one else just now. All I want on earth is to sell out that sheet and shake the dust of this town from my feet for good! Why, if I could nail the right kind of good thing and hand him over the paper—for anything between the two thousand I'm asking and the two cents I expect to get—I could cut loose and take that Chicago job a week from now. It—it won't be open after that," he ended mournfully.

"Oh, perhaps ---"

"I'll sell? Not on your life, my dear boy. That paper has been in the hands of too many brokers for too many months without ever an offer turning up to have one appear at this critical period."

"Nonsense! It's always at such a time that luck changes," the druggist

smiled optimistically.

"Bosh! Not my kind of luck."

Robert's head dropped to his hands once more, and he was silent.

Albert rose and walked to the aisle behind the counter. He glanced down

the empty store and sighed.

Very much indeed would he have liked this unsuccessful elder brother to accept a thousand or so and continue his fight for ultimate standing in the community. He knew, however, the utter hopelessness of Robert's independent spirit accepting such a course, and something of the depression began to settle upon himself.

For the moment there seemed no hope of additional customers. He returned to his chair, and racked his brains for some tactful way of approaching the subject and forcing Robert to accept a small loan. He was forestalled, how-

ever, by the editor.

"Bert, do you know why this paper hasn't been a success?"

"I don't know anything about journalism, Bob," the druggist replied

evasively.

"Then I'll give you a first lesson now. It's because I've been trying to give this town a clean sheet, which could be read everywhere without creating nausea! If I'd chosen to follow the lead of the *Times* and hand out murders galore, with a smattering of all the mis-

cellaneous indecency that could be gathered between the Atlantic and the Pacific, I'd have made money."

"I don't doubt it."

"Or even if I'd fallen in with this muck-rake business—if I'd exposed something or somebody—if I'd even have started an excitement and organized a committee to investigate your soda-fountain and ultimately place you in State prison—I'd gamble that circulation and advertisers would have doubled in a week. That's what this public wants, drat 'em!"

Albert was silent. The simplest course on these occasions was to allow the storm to wear itself out. He took it in this instance.

But the editor could not remain speechless for long. His expression was changing now. His jaw hardened; his eyes lighted up with an ugly glitter and he clenched his fists.

"Well, I'll give it to 'em!" he snarled suddenly. "I'll pass 'em out a line of the choicest, the most odoriferous, muck that ever soiled a sheet! I'll give 'em muck-rake till they can't bear the sight even of the common or garden variety of rake! I'll—"

"Don't talk rot," Albert interrupted

impatiently.

"It's not rot! It's good, hard sense, I tell you!"

He stood erect and thrust his hands in his pockets. He walked up and down the narrow space, breathing hard and fast.

"Now, what am I going to investigate?" he demanded fiercely. "This trust, that trust, and the other trust have been raked over the coals and exposed. Reputations have been blackened by the thousand, concerns have been exposed by the million, markets spoiled by the billion—"

"And what the dickens does it all

amount to?" the druggist asked.

"Cash!" shouted the editor. "Cash for the son of a gun that's doing the exposing—that's what! Cash and advertising, and that's what I need! By crickey, Bert, I will borrow money from you now! In three days I'll have every dead wall in this burg smeared with five-sheet posters and red ink and yellow ornamentations. And they'll in-

form this hungry public that I'm about to expose-what?

"I'm sure I don't know."

"I do-the Drug .Trust!" Robert snapped his fingers triumphantly and dropped back into his chair with a crash. "Go ahead, my boy. Start right in! Tell me all the hideous horrors you can think of about the Drug Trust! Tell me about pills made out of pigs' ears, and elixirs that don't elix, and extracts that are dved with seventeen varieties of poisonous ingredients—all that sort of thing! Begin! Let the war on the horrible, writhing, criminal Drug Trust be opened this instant!"

" Rot!"

"Not at all. Who is the chief criminal—the man at the head? How many years has he served in prisons? many times will he have to be executed if convicted of the charges we are about to make?"

"I'm sure I don't know," the druggist replied wearily. "I'm not aware that there is a Drug Trust."

"What?" Robert's face contracted incredulously. "Do you mean to say that where there is a Peanut Trust and a Shoe-string Trust, a Fly-paper Trust, and a Chewing-gum Trust, there is no Drug Trust? Fudge! You're concealing the fiends yourself! Talk up! Who

are the great big scoundrels?"

"I don't know, I tell you. I'm no' sure that any of them are—the good houses, I mean. Of course, some of them are whoppers for size, and probably they have their own quiet little agreements for keeping up prices to a point where they make a profit. But if there's a criminal combine you'll have to journey around the country and discover it for yourself. I'm not acquainted with it."

"Ha! So he still refuses to divulge the worst! Bert, I believe that you are in the thing yourself! You, born of honest and respectable parents-"

"Oh, dry up!" The druggist reached for a cigar and tossed one to his brother. "This whole muck-rake business makes me distinctly weary, Bob. There may have been something in it at first-there is in most things that get a good start. But it's been overdone now, till there isn't a cobbler-shop in the country that may not be investigated by some fool committee."

"But this grasping Drug Trust-"

"All I can tell you about drugs, my dear boy, is that I buy the best I can get from houses that are reliable and have been so for fifty years before muckraking came into fashion. I get pure goods, pay a fair price for them-and that's the beginning and the end. Business isn't all rotten.'

"Say, do you ever read the papers?" the editor inquired. "Of course it is! There isn't a trade, profession, art, craft, business, or form of manual labor that isn't corrupt from the foundationthat is, if I am judging correctly from the prints. Therefore, this Drug

Trust-

The druggist vawned.

"My dear Bob," he said, "if I knew that every drug manufacturer belonged in jail—that every drug was deadly poison in any quantity—well, I swear, I'd keep my mouth shut, if it was only to spare a long-suffering public!"

"And this is to be the end of a campaign which I had hoped would save thousands of innocent lives-and put thousands of dollars in my pocket?" Robert inquired ironically as he lighted

his own cigar.

"So far as I'm concerned, it is," the druggist laughed.

"Then on your head-"

Bang!

Robert's words were drowned in a crash that seemed to shake the entire

From somewhere without, blue flashes and white flashes and yellow flashes seemed to be springing. There was a firecracker crackling—it swelled to a series of musket-reports.

People were suddenly shouting in the street. The din increased! Robert and his brother leaped to their feet with a

single impulse.

What the-

"Trolley-wire's down again, I guess," the druggist responded, as he tried the rear door hurriedly.

His brother was already hurrying

streetward.

"Sure enough!" he cried. "Racket —fireworks—people jumping all over one another! Hooray!"

The druggist hastened after. Robert turned for a moment.

"Here's where we get a mutual stroke of luck!" he observed, with a slightly excited laugh. "Two-column story for to-morrow's News and a gallon of arnica and court-plaster to be bought here when those chumps get their wits. Come on, Bert!"

They were standing in the doorway now, and witnessing a scene of much enthusiastic action.

Almost before the door stood one of the big open trolley-cars—of the line which runs all the way from Crane's Falls, through Bondville and Worman Center, to Blackfield.

The overhead wire was indeed down. Just as the car had stopped, apparently, the thin strand of copper had snapped, and all the tremendous current with which it was charged appeared to be devoting itself to noise and blinding flashes. They were in the car, and behind the car, and ahead of the car. They seemed to be at either side of the car, and on top as well, as the long end wriggled and hissed and sputtered about.

Passengers were leaping and screaming and shouting wildly. A horse some two or three doors below was absorbed in a fruitless endeavor to stand upon his head and kick down the stars above, being hampered the while by some hundreds of pounds of cart and harness.

A yellow dog shot by, tail between legs, howling frantically, to disappear finally in the cellar of the corner fruitstore. Windows were opening and heads appearing. Bondvillites by the hundred were flocking from every direction—to stand at a most respectful distance and discourse on the criminal negligence of using wire that would break.

"Now, I wonder how many have been killed outright?" the editor murmured,

with pleasant anticipation.

Don't believe there's one," his brother shouted above the din. "They're all out of the car, and there doesn't seem to be any superfluity of corpses about the street, does there?"

"No, but somebody must have—ah! There's the motorman with his rubber gloves on! Thunder! I don't envy him the job of capturing that thingamajig—do. vou?"

"Hardly!" the druggist smiled.
"Phew! Yes, he's got it, too! Well, that's pluck!"

Without a quaver, the railroad man had gathered up the insane bit of wire and was coiling it with some difficulty.

As suddenly as it had arisen, the excitement died down. People came somewhat closer. The late passengers were brushing off the dust of Main Street and saying unkind things about the trolley company.

Yet no one seemed to be seriously injured. After some five minutes the brothers turned away, and the editor led the way to the enclosed rear counter once more. From the roll he tore off a strip of white wrapping-paper and pro-

duced his pencil.

"Well, that's something, anyway!" he observed. "I'll write up the heads here, and a few particulars. Then I'll get out there and interview the crew. and so on, and rush it down to the office. Have a seat, Bert, and suggest something startling in the way of a scarehead. I'll—"

Albert glanced out into the store again, and shook his head as he started down the aisle.

"Can't," he said softly. "Couple of customers."

### CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING ORANGE PHOSPHATE AND ARNICA.

"Come back as soon as you can!" Robert called in an undertone.

The druggist paid no attention.

One of his pet practises lay in attending strictly to business. When a customer entered the Drug Emporium he was made to feel that for Radford no other earthly concern existed but himself and his immediate needs in the drug line. When he left, it was usually with the opinion that Radford was an exceptionally bright and capable young person, and one who deserved to succeed in business.

He neither fawned nor cringed; he simply worked on the theory that when any one dropped in to patronize him, that person was entitled to all possible attention and consideration. It was a good working theory, and in it the astute

read the secret of the druggist's pros-

perity.

In this particular instance, leaving the prescription-counter and advancing to the center of the store, the druggist felt that something might be expected.

Two men were there, strangers to Radford, and evidently of the type of trolley transient with which he was pleasantly familiar. That sort usually laid in a supply of cigars and other odds and ends.

In this case, the pair were even better dressed than usual, in a prosperous fashion wholly devoid of ostentation. They chatted amiably together.

Radford waited a moment and looked

them over curiously.

The smaller man was lean and keen of eye. His nose was sharp, and his chin peculiarly square. He gave one the impression of indomitable force of character, of uprightness and infernal persistence.

There was something queerly familiar about him, too, although at the moment the druggist could not have said just what. Certainly he had never seen the

man before.

For the other, he was taller and heavier, and of less intellectual mien. He might have been a successful Western business man. He chewed incessantly upon a thick black cigar, and talked in a voice of remarkable depth.

He, too, was a strong man; but his strength seemed to that of the other as the bullock to the thoroughbred race-

horse.

"Well, gentlemen?"

Radford's smile was positively charming. The pair turned to him.

"Do this often here?" the larger in-

quired with a laugh.

"Oh, we try to furnish all sorts of diversions," the druggist smiled.

"Suppose it'll take long to get the car

in motion again?"

"I hardly think so, sir. This kind of thing happens once in a while everywhere. The wires have been down once or twice before, in the last year."

"Ah!" The exclamation came almost raspingly from the smaller man. "That fellow's on top of the car at last. I hope to goodness he hurries!"

"He will," Radford assured him.

"The motormen and conductors on this line have to be thoroughly trained electricians, you know."

"Must be expensive to the company,

at union prices.'

"In one way it is, and in another way it is not," Radford explained. "You see, it saves them the cost of a repair force. The towns are a good distance apart, and such a thing as a repairwagon would be impracticable. The cars carry tools and parts with them, and repairs are made in much less time."

Silently, the trio watched the work.

The motorman was atop of the car now, laboring diligently with pincers and wires and other odds and ends. The crowd stood back and surveyed the work.

Radford waited attentively. The pair smoked on in silence until he remarked

gently:

"Is there anything that I can do for you gentlemen?"

The larger turned.

"Yes, although not a great deal. We dropped in for a glass of soda, and I believe I'll take some arnica along for this knee of mine. I tried to break one of your confounded paving-blocks with it when that galvanized snake chased me out of the seat."

The druggist hurried behind his marble slab and stood before the line of brilliant nickel taps. From the rear, a murmur reached him:

"Trolley Tries Tricks—rats! that won't do! Well——"

"I believe I'll have a glass of vanilla," the larger stranger remarked.

"No ice-cream, you know. What shall yours be, Mr.—er—"

Yes, they were chance acquaintances, Radford decided. They did not even know each other's names. The smaller man, by the way, seemed in no particular anxiety to divulge his identity. His sharp eyes ran over the list of flavors.

"Oh-give me an orange phosphate."

he said.

For a minute or two glasses clinked and soda hissed. The two foaming drinks were set in their immaculately shining holders and Radford's smile appeared once more.

"Now, about how much arnica shall

I give you?"

"Eh?" The larger of the strangers

looked at him over the glass. "I don't know-two or three ounces, I supposeenough to soak up a handkerchief and tie up this knee. You probably know better than I do, don't you?"

Radford nodded and disappeared down the aisle. His brother looked up absently as he removed the arnica-bottle

from the shelf.

"More of your customary good

things?" he whispered.

"Only to the extent of about forty cents," the druggist smiled. "The smash-up didn't pan out as you expected, Bob. The court-plaster box

hasn't been opened yet."

"It panned out for me, all right enough," the editor replied. "By the time I've got or faked the names of about twenty passengers and described the injuries they didn't receive this thing is going to occupy the first page and use up all the big type in the office. If I can't muck-rake-

The druggist was not listening. The label was being written in his customary precise hand, and the paste-brush was presently lathering it freely. He dabbed it on to the bottle with a precise little

slap and hurried front again.

The big man was wiping his mouth with a generous handkerchief. smaller set down his empty glass with a slightly wry face as the neatly wrapped bottle was passed over the counter.

"You're generous with your wretched sour phosphate!" he announced, not too pleasantly.

"I beg pardon?" Radford, rinsing

the glasses, opened his eyes.

"That stuff was simply rank!" "Why—I'm very sorry—I---"

"Yes, so am I!" said the small stranger tartly. "Brrrrr!"

The druggist came to the surface

suddenly.

"Our sirups-" Radford began.

"Hang your sirups!" was his reward. "I don't care a rap what they're made of or how pure they are! Drop it! It's all right. I wonder if that car's nearly ready to go ahead?"

He walked to the open door and stood there watching the slow progress of the

"When're you going on?" he cried to

the conductor, who had just passed up a handful of something to his partner.

"Half an hour, sir."

"Good Lord! Not before that?"

"It can't be managed, sir. The break's just ahead, you see. If we don't fix it up the line may be tied up all night. It'll be done just as soon as possible. sir."

" Bah!"

The pleasant little gentleman strode back into the store and sat down before the soda-counter once more.

"I don't know what the devil to make of a system like this," he averred. "It seems to me that this sort of thing ought to be looked into. Here this outfit offers transportation at about half the rate of the steam roads and in pretty nearly the same time. I took it for the sake of getting the fresh air and a little breeze in preference to cinders. Now-"

He snapped his fingers impatiently, and the sour expression of his lean face grew more pronounced. Radford did not reply. He was not responsible for the management of the trolley line, and the orange phosphate criticism had not cut to great depth, coming from this apparently chronically irascible person.

"Oh, they'll get into motion between now and midnight," the large man re-

marked cheerfully.

"Doubtless, but I had hoped to reach Worman's Center and be in bed something before that hour. I've got a long ride to-morrow that I can't possibly miss, and this blasted delay-" He broke off and turned to Radford with a glare. "I say, you! What the devil was in that stuff, anyway?"

"Sugar, orange-juice, and carbonated distilled water, with a little phosphate of lime," the druggist replied evenly.

"Pish! I mean actually!"

"That is all there actually was, sir.

I make my own sirups."

An exasperated click of the tongue was the only comment, for the moment. The small and cynical eyes glared through the doorway at the unconscious motorman on the car.

The larger man passed out a bill, and the druggist made change. He took a last glance at the irritable visitor, and resolved to flee behind the prescriptioncounter.

It was not to be. The small man turned savagely at him.

"Young man," he snapped, "do you know that your unspeakable mess, there,

has given me a pain?"

Radford eyed him in silence for a minute. He was tempted to remark that even in the face of this terrific catastrophe the roof had not fallen in, nor had any one of the stars dropped suddenly into Bondville. But principle prevented, and he merely smiled suavely.

"I'm quite sure that it was not the

soda-water, sir."

"And I'm quite sure that it was. I'll have you understand that I'm not subject to pains. Why the devil did I ever drink the mess?"

"I'm sure I can't explain that, sir. I didn't ask you to," Radford remarked

with gathering warmth.

"By George, sir! You should be blacklisted all over the country! That stuff's poison!"

The larger man grinned at Radford

and patted the other on the back.

"Nonsense!" said the big voice.
"The stuff was all right. You're just a little touchy over being held up."

The irascible person said nothing for a little. His lips whitened, and his face developed sudden lines of pain. Then, after a minute or two, he turned sharply to Radford:

"Look here, young man! I don't pretend to know what your mess was made of, but I can tell you that I'm suffering! Give me something to counteract it, and do it quick!"

"But I can't give you-

"Drop it, I tell you! Give me something to stop this, or I'll have you in jail before I leave this town!"

"Now, my dear sir!" Radford pro-

tested.

"My dear sir be hanged! I—a-a-ah!"

The druggist stared somewhat. The face of the larger man grew longer. Robert Radford, who had stepped out to enjoy the episode, suddenly ceased to smile.

There could be no doubt about it.

The man was in extreme pain.

"This chap's suffering." his companion remarked sharply. "What the deuce was in the stuff?"

"Nothing whatever that should not have been there, I assure you!" Radford cried. "I——"

"Well, whatever it was, something must be done for him, and immediately.

Why, he can hardly speak!"

He grasped the smaller man as he tottered and gasped. He stared from the victim to the druggist, and there was an expression in his eyes which made Radford, innocent though he was, flush suddenly.

"We'll take him in back," he said briefly. "There's no use kicking up any

new excitement just now."

He laid hold of the other arm, and together they piloted the staggering little man behind the prescription-counter. The editor, thoroughly startled, pushed forward the lounging-chair, and into it the sufferer dropped with a groan of agony that sent a cold chill along at least two spinal columns.

"Now-what is it?" the big man asked curtly. "What're you going to

give him, druggist?"

Radford's eye ran along the lines of pottles.

"What sort of trouble is he subject to?" he asked.

"Subject to! Orange phosphate, just now, I think!"

"Well, he's not!" Radford cried sharply. "This must be something constitutional, my dear man. I'm not a physician. I don't pretend to understand what has struck him. Suppose——"

"Good Lord!" the editor interrupted. "Give him some whisky, or brandy, or something of the sort. He looks as if he were going to collapse in

ten seconds.'

Breathing hard, the druggist ran to a tall bottle and poured out a generous dose. He hurried back to the stricken man and tried to place it at his lips.

Intentionally or otherwise, a clutching hand shot out and sent the glass across

the floor, a clattering wreck.

"Get a doctor!" the big man fairly shouted. "Can't you see that he's beyond any devilish pill-mixer? Get a doctor, and do it quick! I'll stay here with him while you're gone! Quick!"

" But----"

"Never mind whether you suffer for-

it or not! Would you have a man die rather than have your infernal sodafountain queered? Hurry up!"

Radford's mouth opened for a minute; his eyes stared blankly. His brother, less easily excited, grasped his arm and shook him.

"Brace up!" he cried. "Don't be an ass, Bert! You go for Dr. Foster. I'll go the other way and try to get Donald-

The druggist nodded acquiescence and jumped from behind the prescription-counter. At his heels, as he passed into Main Street, came his brother. Without a word, they separated, one going one way and one the other.

Getting a doctor quickly in the downtown part of Bondville is not the sim-

plest matter on earth.

The big detached houses and the ample grounds that prevail throughout town have placed the heart of the residential section well away from the business portion, and it is here, naturally, that most of the medical profession are located. Near to the Drug Emporium, however, are Dr. Donaldson and Dr. Foster, and for them the brothers started—to learn that when one seeks to make haste it is often made slowly.

The editor was stopped by his young college man, who insisted upon conferring with him, then and there, about the amount of space to be devoted to the trolley excitement. He ran with him to the home of the physician and button-holed him at the gateway of the house.

As concerned the druggist, excitement made rapid progress rather impracticable. He did his best, but succeeded in colliding with one out of every four men

he met on the street.

Even at that, he was first to return to the store—alone. Some half a block away, he saw Robert, also hurrying back, also alone. The sufferer within seemed doomed to suffer unalleviated.

"Didn't you get him?" the druggist

asked.

"Donaldson's out. I left word for him to come as soon as he returned. How about Foster?"

"Out, too!" the druggist panted. "He'll be here as soon as he gets back, I think, but—"

"Never mind," Robert said sharply;

"probably the fellow's better by this time, anyway. Maybe it was his confounded crankiness that struck in. Come along and we'll see, Bert."

He entered the store briskly, the drug-

gist just behind him.

Inside the door, they listened instinctively. There was no sound whatever from behind the enclosed counter.

"Better?" Radford called.

There was no reply. The brothers glanced at each other for an instant. The druggist heaved a sigh of relief as he led the way back.

Very likely the man was over whatever sort of attack he had suffered very likely he had left and was waiting

outside for the car to start.

But as he turned the corner and disappeared behind the stained glass an inarticulate cry escaped him. The editor hurried to his side:

Albert was staring. Robert followed his gaze and started back with a gasp.

There, prone on the floor, ominously still, lay the figure of the smaller man—alone! Of the other, there was no sign whatever!

With a groan, the druggist bent over him. He turned him on his back and gazed into glazed eyes. He looked up at his brother, and his cheeks were white as the prostrate man's.

"Bob!" he gulped. "I don't know much about medicine or anything of that sort, but—this man's as dead as a door-

nail!"

### CHAPTER III.

THE STRONG FINGER OF SUSPICION.

"DEAD!"

The editor, until now by far the calmer of the two, stared with dropped jaw at the gruesome length on the floor. His face whitened, and his eyes were very wide.

As his perturbation increased, his

brother's lessened.

To Albert, the first shock had been rather severe. His existence in Bondville had run a beautifully smooth and easy course. To have a man walk in and partake of his orange phosphate and then become violently ill was both annoying and exciting to one of his temperament. To return fifteen minutes.

later and find the same man stark dead and alone was a calamity of too great magnitude to permit of any nervous upheaval.

"He's certainly dead, Bob," he repeated. "There isn't the first sign of heart or any other action. He must have gone quickly."

"But what was it?"

The druggist looked up gravely.

"Some sort of heart trouble, probably. I saw him jump out of that car with a yell when the trouble first began. Very likely the shock and the excitement were too much for him."

"It couldn't have been--"

"Anything in that soda? Certainly not. Miggs makes all that sort of stuff in sirup form, and he's as careful a junior as there is in the country. I wish it wasn't his night off!"

"And still, as-soon as he took it he keeled over!" the editor muttered. "Bert, you can't have made some horri-

ble mistake \_\_\_"

"I have not!" the druggist replied, almost fiercely. "There is no more connection between that soda-fountain and this man's death than there would be between your press breaking down and this store closing at night!"

They faced each other in silence for

a little.

Outside, a sudden whirring announced that the car had started up again and was on its way to Worman's Center. They hardly noticed it; they hardly heard the light chatter of the departing crowd.

"And where's the chap who was to stay with him?" Robert inquired, in a

low voice.

"I give it up, Bob. I——" The druggist's eye fell upon a prescription-pad of the store, lying on the work-table.

There was a line or two on it, freshly written in a bold hand. Albert seized it and held it to the light.

"He ·left a message, anyway!" he

muttered.

"What is it?"

The druggist moistened his lips and dragged his eyes away from the still figure on the floor.

"'You are both infernally slow,'" he read. "'This man is unconscious,

and apparently dying. I have gone for a physician myself, and shall probably return with him before either of you reappear."

"Complimentary!" said the editor.

"Probably he was a little excited himself, watching the man suffer, and all that sort of thing. At any rate, he must have left—and the man must have died immediately afterward."

He dropped the pad and himself sank into a chair. His eyes sought his brother's for a little, and took to wandering

around the store.

"Great God!" he muttered. "What

a thing to happen!"

There was something about that motionless thing on the floor which fascinated both men in a gruesome fashion.

Speechlessly they stared at it, for the

time incapable of action.

Outside the store, removed from view of the tragedy, a girl's rather shrill voice burst into hearty laughter. Two deeper voices joined, guffawing uproariously.

The down-car came to a standstill for a moment. They heard the "Bondville!" shouted by the conductor. The bell clanged harshly; the brake was released, and the singing of the wires told

of the car's departure.

Across the street, from the musicstore, a phonograph began a raucous jumble of noise. Somebody announced something, and somebody else—in the machine—began to shriek adjurations to "Nellie" to "wait until the sun shines!"

For no particular reason, the brothers listened to the din. The end came, and a hand or two clapped among those careless loiterers who congregated before the door whenever the big phonograph-horn began business.

Albert pulled himself together with

a strong effort.

"We're not conducting a wake here. Bob," he said suddenly. "We can't sit by this poor devil all night and——"

Quick steps entered the store. A mel-

low voice called:

"I say, Radford!"

"Foster!" cried the druggist, in sudden relief.

"What the dickens is up here?" the genial voice pursued. "Been taking

some of your own prescriptions, Radford?"

"Come back here, doctor."

A pair of humorously twinkling blue eves and a Vandyke beard came around the corner of the counter, followed by a muscular body and a black bag.

"There's a dead man here, Foster!"

said the druggist gravely.

The humorous eyes sobered suddenly. The doctor dropped his bag to the counter and looked at the figure on the floor.

"Who the devil's that?" was the

physician's query.

"We don't know, Foster. He got off the car with another man and drank a glass of soda-water," the druggist answered. "After that, he took sick, and-well, he seems to be dead now."

"When did he die?"

"We don't know that, either. Bob and I went for you and Donaldson. We left the poor chap here with the other fellow, and when we came back he was alone-and dead!"

"Humph!" The physician pursed "What did he drink, Radford-headache fizz, or anything of that sort that might go to a weak heart?"

"He had nothing but orange phos-

phate, doctor."

"And that knocked him out?"

"No, it did not!"

The doctor glanced at the druggist with the faintest shadow of a twinkle in his eyes. He was rather well acquainted with people who had passed to the Beyond.

"Never mind, Radford; I'm not accusing the phosphate, you know. Things have been said about your soda-water,

hut---"

He walked to the side of the dead man and sank to his knees. He picked up the limp hand—and dropped it as

quickly.

"Well, there isn't much doubt about the present status of the case," he observed dryly. "This gentleman's about as dead as any one I have ever observed in the course of my practise."

"We-we thought that."

"You thought right, then, but---" He bent more closely to examine the body. He prodded, and felt about, and came close to the face of the corpse.

Then he stood erect with rather an odd expression.

"What do you suppose this man died of, Radford?"

"Heart-failure, as nearly as I can see."

The physician stroked his beard. He looked at the druggist for an instant. and his gaze settled upon a row of bot-

"You don't see straight in this case, friend. The man's been poisoned!"

"What!"

"Surest thing that ever happened. I don't pretend, just now, to say what it is, but I'd swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high that he has been fixed within the last half-hour!"

"But-" gasped the druggist.

"Oh, I'm not saying that it was your soda-water," smiled the doctor. "But somehow or other he has acquired a big dose of some mighty active poison, and from all indications I should say that it was cyanide of potash, or some other salt of cyanogen."

"And how on earth would he get

that?"

"Give it up. Unless, of course, he wanted to commit suicide. Did he seem despondent, or anything of that kind?"

"Not a bit of it. He was cranky enough to—" the druggist began, and stopped short. It seemed rather a low trick to comment upon the dead man's eccentricities just then.

Dr. Foster walked over to a chair and settled comfortably to a cigarette.

"I can't touch this chap, you know, Radford," he said. "I'm only the board of health in this vicinity. aldson's the coroner, you know.'

"We've sent for him, too."

"Then the sooner he gets here the better. We'll have to ring the town undertaker out of bed if he doesn't arrive soon."

The druggist sighed. The editor sighed, too, but in a different way.

Instead of one story for the Morning News, he had two. It was rather unkind to be glad of it, but he regarded the situation from a professional standpoint and wished that the coroner would appear.

He had not long to wait.

Foster had just flicked the ash from

his cigarette and opened his mouth to speak, when a heavy tread entered the store and stopped.

The druggist arose hurriedly and

went forward.

"Dr. Donaldson, we've got a job for

vou here!"

The heavy tread took up its way once more, and behind the counter came a heavy, sharp-eyed, smooth-shaven man of fifty or thereabout. He looked questioningly from one to the other; he nodded to his fellow practitioner.

"Thought this was a hurry call?"

he observed.

"It was-for a doctor," Radford said.

"And now," Foster remarked, "it's for a coroner."

His finger indicated the man upon the

"I haven't touched him, except to turn him over," he said briefly. "As I understand it, he got off that car that was in trouble, came in here with another man, and had some soda. Radford, here, and his brother, very shortly after, found him getting sick and went for us, leaving the man in charge of the other. When they returned, five or ten minutes later, this chap was dead and the other man had disappeared. That's about all."

"The other man left a note," Radford supplemented. "There it is, Dr. Donaldson."

The coroner glanced over it briefly and laid it down again without comment. He was a man of very few words at best; just now he seemed to have grown positively tongueless.

With a shrug, he walked to the corpse and sank to his knees beside it, as Foster had done. For a little he examined the uncanny thing without a word; then

he looked up.

"Man's been poisoned," he announced.

"So I said," Foster nodded.

"There isn't any indication of organic trouble—on the surface, at any rate. Do I understand that he died after drinking some of your soda, Radford?"

"Yes, after, but not because of it," the druggist replied irritably. "He came in and--"

"Never mind that part," said the coroner. "Roughly speaking, I should say that the administration of some cyanide or salt of hydrocyanic acid had caused death. He became ill *immediate-ly* after drinking?"

"Within five or ten minutes."

"Complain about the taste of the stuff he drank?"

Donaldson's eyes were positively piercing as he surveyed the druggist. Beyond any doubt there was nothing of which the druggist could be accused; yet he turned a faint pink before the keen glance.

"Yes, he did," he acknowledged.
"He said that it was rank, and—some-

thing more to the same effect."

"Don't blame him—cyanogen isn't exactly an appetizer. What bottles did you use, Radford?"

"The orange sirup and the acid phos-

phate, doctor."

"Where are they now?"

"Just where I left them when I was through mixing the stuff."

"I'll look at them, please."

The druggist started for the sodacounter. The coroner was not three feet behind him.

Without comment, Radford produced the two. Donaldson held them up and shook them, looking sharply for any sediment.

"You've got sealing-wax about?" he asked laconically.

"Of course."

"I'd like to borrow it, if you please." He set the bottle before him on the marble slab. "Bring a couple of gummed labels, too, if you will, and two corks to fit these bottles."

Radford retreated hurriedly behind the prescription-counter and produced the articles. Donaldson received them with a nod.

With the most utterly methodical air he removed the fancy nickel stoppers and substituted plain corks, forcing them down flush with the necks of the bottles. He laid his match-box before him, and smeared the tops plentifully with wax. He impressed the soft mass with his seal-ring.

Next, he printed "Exhibit A" and "Exhibit B" upon the gummed labels, together with a pote or two

together with a note or two.

"So much for that," remarked this businesslike medico. "I'll express those to Chicago for analysis before I go to bed, Radford, Bosh! Don't look that way, young man. If you know what's in your stuff you've certainly nothing to fear. It's only a formality, you understand, but a necessary one. It's a perfectly plain case of poisoning to me, even before we perform an autopsy. Come. We'll look over the gentleman himself and see what can be discovered further."

A bottle in either hand, he started for the rear portion of the store again. Radford followed, somewhat dazed.

Just one hour ago he had been the most placid and prosperous sort of mortal possible. Now-well, at the very mildest, he seemed to be a leading figure in a murder or a suicide case. It was slightly disconcerting.

But if it confused him, it had no similar effect upon Dr. Donaldson. That person calmly set the bottles beside his colleague and returned to the

corpse.

"Just give me a hand, here, Foster." he said. "We'll straighten him out and see what can be learned. Any idea who he is, Radford?"

"Not the slightest in the world, doctor. You are as well acquainted with

him as I am."

"He-he looks familiar, somehow,

"I had thought the same thing, but I couldn't place him," the druggist muttered.

The body was raised and carried across the space and laid flat. Radford, accustomed to minor accidents and injuries, turned away. His brother walked from behind the counter and devoted his attention to the cigar-case until the process was over.

An exclamation of Foster's brought

him back.

" Hello! There's a sheet of paper under him-where he fell, evidently."

"Yes, and an uncapped fountain-pen as well," the coroner observed.

Robert Radford hurried back. brother and the two physicians were leaning over the vacated spot. aldson picked up a bit of white paper, plainly the back of a used envelope.

"Yes, he was trying to write something when he gave out and died," he observed. "It's pretty scraggly and ir-

regular, but-wait a minute.

He carried the fragment to the light over the scales, and with his glasses perched on the end of his nose, squinted at it. He dropped it at last and turned with a peculiar smile to the others.

"A rather odd document!" he com-

mented.

"What does it say?" the druggist

"Not a great deal, my young friend, but what it does say is not altogether complimentary to yourself. It—it is pretty disconnected, but as nearly as I can decipher it it is:

" ' Murdered — druggist — grudge — Drug Trust — revelations — paid undoubtedly by——' And then there's a long gap and he says, simply, 'dying!'"

"Murdered!" Radford gasped. His brother stepped forward. "May I see that, doctor?"

"You may see, but not touch," the coroner commented dryly. "I'll keep

my hands on it, if you please."

He held the paper forward, and Robert Radford read the scrawl. straightened up with a sigh, and the coroner turned to the druggist.

"That one of your envelopes, Radford? Thanks. I'll borrow it. Er-

Exhibit C. Ouite so."

He tucked the envelope into his pocket and pursed his lips. The trio watched him silently. Donaldson considered for a very brief space.

"Now I think we'll search the body." he announced, "and then I shall issue a permit for its removal from the store at once. Will you assist in the process,

Dr. Foster?"

His fellow physician nodded assent and walked to the remains. Donaldson squatted beside him and began a

methodical tour of the pockets.

"Eighty dollars and forty cents in this pocket," he remarked. "I think we'll seal these things up separately if Radford will give us the envelopes. Ah, thank you. Will you please mark those for identification, Foster?"

He passed the money over and went

"Keys. A penknife also. Ah, yes,

and a cigar-case with the monogram 'T. B.' Not particularly significant."

Foster received the articles. Donaldson turned the body slightly and went on with his search.

"Bank-book and several letters—evidently personal. Um-um. All the same

name, too."

"And what is it?" the editor asked. The coroner did not answer directly. He had found a card-case, and having opened it, saw some dozen slips of pasteboard slide into his hand. He glanced over them and replaced them with an emphatic nod.

"There is not the slightest doubt in the world," he announced positively. "This poor devil is none other than

Thomas Bandmann!"

"What!" cried the druggist.

"Not Bandmann, the muck-raker?" the editor gasped. "Not the fellow who has exposed half the combines in the country—the fellow who put Hagenthorn and all the rest in jail? It isn't that Bandmann?"

Donaldson regarded him quite plac-

idly.

"It is unquestionably the same man," he said evenly. "I have never seen him before, but I have seen many of his pictures. Now I understand why the features were so very familiar."

"But is it possible that the man who turned the Senate and the House and the Legislatures of a dozen States on

end is-dead?"

The coroner smiled grimly.

"Unless you are more capable than I in detecting heart-action in a body already well toward the rigor mortis stage, Mr. Radford," he said, "it is quite possible. More than that, it is an extremely cold fact."

"But isn't he supposed to be work-

ing on-"

Donaldson arose and looked from one brother to the other. His eyes were very cold and sharp. It was rather a habit of those eyes, to be sure, yet now they seemed colder and sharper than ever before.

"Bandmann was at work upon an exposé of the drug and patent-medicine people, I believe, gentlemen."

He pursed his lips again, and again

smiled slightly.

"How very odd that he should have come to his end in a drug-store!"

He turned to Radford and fairly transfixed him with the steely glitter.

"I am going to have this body removed to Smith's undertaking place tonight," he remarked. "I shall probably stay there myself until morning, when Foster and I will perform an autopsy to determine positively the cause of death—although, as it is, there can be hardly a doubt."

He frowned thoughtfully and looked

at the druggist again.

"At noon or thereabout, Mr. Radford, I shall open the inquest before a coroner's jury. Will you be present voluntarily, or shall I subpœna you?"

The druggist swallowed hard, but he

returned the stare.

"I shall be present, of course," he said in a low voice.

### CHAPTER IV.

THE NET OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

Dr. Donaldson, wheeling suddenly, turned his back to Radford and began to gather the various exhibits into his

bag.

The tension seemed abruptly to have relaxed. The druggist stared at the coroner's broad back almost in amazement. Donaldson had never been altogether friendly, far less genial; he possessed a reputation for extreme bruskness and short speech, yet in this affair he seemed positively inhuman in the chill manner with which he conducted the business.

Radford felt rather in need of sympathy just then, and he was glad to find it in Foster's eyes.

The bag closed with a snap, and Don-

aldson turned to the group.

"Coming with me, Foster? All right. I'll have Smith's wagon here in the course of half an hour, Radford. You'll wait for him?"

"Certainly."

"And be at the court-house at eleven to-morrow, if you can. You'll have to give considerable evidence, and we may as well get it into coherent shape for the jury. Good night."

"Good night," said the brothers.

Left alone, they stared at each other,

and Robert smiled slightly.

"From the way he went about it you might think he had a poisoning case every day in the week, eh?"

"Well, I'm glad he hasn't—around this store," said the druggist. "Con-

found that fellow, anyway!'

" Why?"

"Why, he seemed fairly to be accusing me of murdering the man!" Albert cried, rather excitedly.

" Bosh!"

"It's not bosh! He said-"

Robert rose and placed a hand on his brother's shoulder.

"My dear boy, all this has worked you up. Donaldson wasn't accusing you of anything, you chump! It's merely his way. He got through with what he had to do in jig time—that's all."

"But he said-"

"That it was queer the man died in a drug-store? Well, so it was, perhaps:

That doesn't mean anything."

"And then that infernal note the fellow scribbled before he died. Why, that made it look almost as if I had poisoned the man deliberately!" Radford rose and walked rapidly up and down the narrow space.

"It did nothing of the sort, Bert. Don't be so wretchedly silly. You're a bit overstrained because of all this.

Shall I stay with you?"

"Do you want to leave?"

"Well—" Robert smiled doubtfully. "There's a lot to be written up before we go to press, you know, and—"

"Go ahead, Bob."

The editor hardly needed a second bidding. He gathered together the scraps of paper on which he had been scribbling from time to time and thrust

them into his pocket.

"Now, don't fuss about this, and don't fuss about Donaldson," he said lightly. "It could as well have happened anywhere else in town as here—and we know that you're not to blame in the slightest."

"But to feel-"

"Don't feel. Forget about it. When that inquest is over and our businesslike friend has had your soft stuff analyzed you'll find yourself entirely exonerated. It's more than likely that the autopsy will show the man died of heart trouble or something else brought on by the excitement, By-by—and don't worry."

He stepped hurriedly out, and Albert followed him toward the door. There the editor paused and looked back with

a grin.

"As yet, not a word of this has leaked out, boy," he said. "If any one from the *Times* turns up around here don't give them the tenth part of a single detail. For once, at least, I'll have the biggest scoop in Bondville. Good night, Bert."

He went down the street almost at a run.

The druggist, looking after him, sighed heavily and tried to collect his thoughts.

In all the time that he had been running Bondville's drug-store not even one prescription had gone amiss—not one patron, to the best of his memory, had evinced dissatisfaction.

Every blessed thing had been as good and as perfect as he could make or buy it. Even down to the soda-fountain, Radford was convinced that a better article could not be found in the State than the sizzling, foaming liquids which he served over the immaculate marble counter.

And now! Perhaps it was the suddenness, the utter unexpectedness, of the whole beastly affair, but Albert found himself shaking violently.

Main Street was very nearly empty now, for time had been passing unnoticed. The music-store was closed, and the shades down. Crane & Brown's big stationery-shop, too, was locked up for

the night.

Starr's wholesale and retail dry-goods place was dark and shadowy save for the single incandescent which burned eternally in the window. Even the indefatigable Neapolitan on the far corner was locking the top of his stand and preparing to retire to his cellar until another dawn.

Radford fixed his absent gaze on the light in the window. He thought and thought, and thought and thought.

He wondered whether this would hurt business much, whether the soda trade would switch over to Schlagenheim's Star Confectionery as a result. Of course, when the Chicago analysis was completed it would be shown that his wares were the purest and most delectable to be obtained on earth, but still

A voice aroused him. Before the door a black wagon had driven up. Radford started as his eyes left the solitary light and met those of Jim Smith, the undertaker, and those of one of Bondville's ten uniformed policemen.

"Excitement been kicking up here, Bert?" the former observed genially.

"Eh?" muttered the druggist. "Yes, too darned much excitement, Jim!"

\* \* \* \* \*

It was something after three when Radford returned from the inquest and allowed the resentful Miggs to seek a long-delayed lunch.

His brother, who had naturally attended the affair, walked back with him, and his face was graver than on the previous night. The two settled in chairs in the store, and for a while neither spoke.

"Donaldson certainly did try to drag me over the coals," the druggist ob-

served at last.

"It was the very dickens of a cross-

examination," Robert agreed.

"Why, he seemed to be trying to make me commit myself to—something or other," Albert pursued gloomily.

"He was only trying to get the whole

story, Bert."

"Well, I had no reason on earth for not giving it to him. Why did he go at it in such a fashion?"

" Just his way, Bert."

"Perhaps, but—" The druggist's eyes wandered to the soda-fountain, and he scowled. "Confound that affair, anyway! I'll rip it out and sell it for junk, and—"

Bah! Don't be absurd, my dear

boy."

"But this thing's got me all worked up!" the druggist cried. "I don't mind it so much myself, but every one in town knows that I'm engaged to Ethel, and all this beastly chatter and gossip—"

"Well, my dear brother, when a girl thinks enough of a man to marry him

do you imagine that an accident of this sort is going to affect her?"

"Perhaps not; but it's devilish unpleasant to think of people pointing her out as the prospective wife of the fellow who sells poisoned soda-water!"

"And all that sort of thing is pure poppycock, as you know perfectly well. Why, Donaldson'll hear from his chemical analysis by to-morrow morning at the latest. You'll be cleared of any suspicion of carelessness—and that'll be the end of it!"

"Do you believe that it really will be the end of it?" Albert asked gravely.

The editor faced him for an instant and dropped his eyes.

"Of course it will!" he snapped.
"Why on earth shouldn't it?"

"I don't know, but----"

The druggist's voice trailed away gloomily. His brother rose and slapped him on the shoulder.

"This time to-morrow you and your soda-fountain will be absolved of all homicidal tendencies," he said, with a little laugh. "Buck up, Bert! You're getting positively morbid, and the main reason is that things have been going along so smoothly with you that any jar—let alone a big one like this—seems magnified to your pampered brain."

He waited for the reply which did not

come.

"Aha! Here are the Bates girls and that Chicago young woman who's visiting them. More candy, Bert! Brace up! If I'm not around this evening drop in at the office."

He strode out, and the girls entered. Radford mustered a poor imitation of his best store smile and gathered himself to answer questions as lightly as

might be possible.

The afternoon dragged slowly to a close.

People came in throngs to talk over the tremendous excitement and learn all that might be learned from one of the most central figures. Radford answered as superficially and as evasively as possible—and he began to note something a trifle odd.

At first he laid it to imagination and overwrought nerves. An hour later he could not but call it fact. People were looking queerly at him!

It may have been natural enough: the druggist could not consider it so. After his time of striving to please, indignation boiled up within him at the way visitors seemed to shy from his immediate vicinity.

And there was no doubt whatever about it-they were doing that and noth-

ing else.

When he stepped from behind the counter and crossed the store the genial slap on the shoulder, the cheap joke, were conspicuous by their utter absence. The people appeared to shrink from actual contact with him, as if in fear of some unknown peril.

They watched him furtively when he was not looking; he could feel the eyes on his back. They whispered when he was in the rear, and suddenly straightened up and looked unconcerned when he appeared. The soda-fountain was

shunned absolutely.

Perhaps he could not altogether blame them, but-well, it cut into him, somehow. He had done his level best to invite and to justify confidence in 1 imself and all that he did; he had believed that he had gained it. Now, because the eminent Mr. Bandmann had chosen to walk in and die, it was dissipated in a twinkling!

Supper-time came, and Radford; sore and weary and sick at heart, sent Miggs to the near-by restaurant for a meal. He could not contemplate the ordeal of supper at his boarding-house, with the dozen curious tongues and the two dozen curious eyes to quiz him.

Alone, he was eating without interest,

when some one entered.

Radford dropped his napkin and arose, but he was no more than on his feet when around the prescriptioncounter corner appeared gray Phil Sherwood, sheriff of Bond County!

"Evening, Bert!" that person said,

without looking at him.

"Good evening, Sherwood."

"Don't bother gettin' up, boy. on with your fodder. I'll sit here. "Tain't any hurry."

Albert nodded listlessly and continued

to eat.

Here, he presumed, was another series of questions to be answered. Sherwood was about to take a part in the investigations, too. Well, it should be staved off as long as possible.

· Radford sipped his coffee slowly and listened to Miggs, in the outer store, relating the tale of the tragedy for the nine-hundred-and-ninetieth time.

He put down the cup at last and turned to the sheriff. Sherwood, with a nod, drew his chair closer and laid a hand on Radford's knee.

"Boy," he said solemnly, "I guess I'm going to turn tail on my duty as an

officer of the law for once."

"Eh?" Radford's eyes opened sud-

denly. "Why?"

"Mainly because your paw and I worked together forty years back, Bert. Because he was one o' the best fellers that a man ever knew, and his sons are 'bout the same. Because I owed him more than I could ever pay back before he died, Bert; and just now, if I can make things a little easier for his youngest boy-well, I'm goin' to shut my eyes for once."

"But good Lord!" The druggist sat back and stared. "What the dickens is

all this mystery for?"

"Hush!" Sherwood held up a warning hand. "There's no particular use in havin' a crowd back here, Bert. What I have to say I don't want to be leaking all over town."

"But do you mean to tell me that you're not here simply to get an account

of the affair, man?"

"Bert," said the sheriff, "I've got too darned good an account of it as it is, I'm afraid!"

"And what the deuce does that sig-

nify?"

Radford sat up, and his eyes contracted.

The sheriff's own eyes dropped. His hard hands clasped; the lines in his face told of real mental suffering.

"Bert," he said, almost in a whisper, "they've got an almighty black case

against you!"

"A case against me!" gasped the

druggist.

"Shut up, boy. Yes, that and nothing more or less. It's a wretched, blacklooking thing from one end to the other.'

· But-

"Say, I don't believe for a minute

that you killed him." Sherwood an-

nounced, facing him squarely.

"Great God! I should hope that you didn't! But—is it possible that any one else does?"

"More people than you have any idea of, Bert!"

"Why-I-I can't believe that it's possible!" White and staring, Radford gripped the sheriff's knee. "Why gripped the sheriff's knee.

"This Bandmann came in here last night," the sheriff pursued softly. "He walks to the fountain there and takes a drink. He gets sick-and dies. Under him they find his pen and a note practically accusing you of poisoning him. That's pretty straight in itself, isn't

"It's fact, of course," said Radford hotly, "but the man was in paincrazy-he didn't know what he wrote,

" Wait. This morning Donaldson performed the autopsy and found a heap of this here cyanide of potash, or whatever it was. That was something a man wouldn't be likely to carry around with him-but you could get it in any drugstore in the country. Boy, do you blame people if they sort of think-

"But it's rot-tommyrot-absolute infernal rot!" the druggist said wildly. "Why under the sun should I want to kill a man I never saw in all my life before? I tell you it's crazy. would be no more sign of a motive for my wanting to murder him than-"

"Hold on, Bert. Donaldson seems to have taken a blamed keen interest in this thing. The county prosecutor was at the inquest this morning, and I understand that they've been doing considerable wiring around the country to-day. Ferns is a pretty energetic prosecutor, you know, and he has ways of unearthing things."

"But there isn't anything to unearth

"They've found out that you owe two or three of the biggest drug-houses in the country some whopping big bills."

"I always do at this time of the month! I-

"And they have also ascertained that you stand in pretty close with the big people. More than that, they've made

certain that this Bandmann was just about ready to get busy exposing a lot There's—there's of big drug people. some sort of motive."

"And is it the supposition," gasped Radford, "that I'm in the pay of the supposed Drug Trust, and that I was simply waiting to have this man run in -and then murder him?"

"Well, if it ain't exactly that, Bert, it's something similar. Ferns-Ferns said that-well, that it looked as if you saw your chance to get solider than rock with the big drug people andand took it!"

Radford's jaw dropped. The bottles -the scales—the stained-glass panels the lights-everything seemed to swim around him, before him, over him. His brain could hardly grasp the horror just then. It was all too crazy, too utterly overdrawn for credence by a sane man.

Ferns was indeed an energetic pursuer of the criminal; his faculty for shaping theories—and his deadly power of proving correct even the most outrageously improbable of them-had given him a reputation. If he chose to think that Radford, wholly innocent, had done the deed, there was no telling where it would end .-

But it couldn't be—it simply couldn't Radford couldn't be hearing correctly; Sherwood must be mad!

The druggist strove hard to collect his thoughts, and in a measure he was successful; for suddenly he saw that an infinity of things might depend upon his keeping his head at this juncture. He licked his lips and spoke with some dif-

"Sherwood-that fellow who came in here with Bandmann-"

The sheriff looked up keenly.

"I won't deny that I'd like to have a talk with him myself, Bert," he said. "Still, Ferns says that while he'd like very much to have him for a witness, he doesn't attach much importance to him. He says that doubtless he was merely what he seemed—a chance acquaintance of the car. He may be

"But what has become of him?" "That's a point I raised myself. It didn't feeze Ferns much. He offere'd the explanation that the man saw you and Bob go in here again-that he was in a hurry, and the car ready to startand that as he knew the man would be cared for and probably didn't wish to be delayed himself, he simply did the most natural thing and jumped aboard."

Radford drew a long breath.

Mentally, he tried to place himself in the position of the prosecutor, of the public in general. At first glance, he was forced to admit that things looked slightly queer. But still, he-why, he must be cleared! There wasn't an atom of doubt about that part.

"Sherwood," he said suddenly, "when

that stuff in Chicago has been ana-

The sheriff's head came up with a

"Bert." he cried, "even if it's as pure as the air, it won't make a darn bit of difference!"

"What!"

"They think they've got case enough without it, boy. Damn it! I can't keep it from you any longer. I came to sort of break the shock, but-Bert, between now and to-morrow morning you're going to be arrested, and when you go on trial it'll be for murder in the first degree."

(To be continued.)

## BY THE SECRET DOOR.

BY MARY IMLAY TAYLOR.

A story of modern St. Petersburg in which an American risks much for the prince on account of the princess.

SHE stopped abruptly between the two white lilacs.

"You!" she exclaimed—"you—of all

people—and in St. Petersburg!"

"Where else, princess," he asked, "since the sun rises here?"

She looked at him archly.

"Does it?" she said; "and you an American, Captain Crenyon! Ah," she added, "I know you came to see our Duma."

"No," he replied, "to see the Princess

"It seems a long time since we met in Monaco, doesn't it?" she remarked irrelevantly. "I should like to ask you to tea, but my duenna is out, and-" She smiled, and looked at the gate between her garden and Moritzsky's.

"If it's only the gate," he began.
"Oh, but it isn't!" she interposed hastily, and blushed. "It isn't the cus-

tom," she added prettily.

"A fig for custom!" he exclaimed. "If we're its slaves the deputies will never get amnesty and I shall never taste that tea."

She regarded him thoughtfully, her fingers playing absently with the white "I hope they will get it!" she said.

"I pray they will."

"What? The tea?" he asked mildly. "Do you remember the tea we drank in the garden in Monaco?"

"How blue the sea was!" she said

softly. "Do you remember?"

"I remember everything," he replied.
"It was a perfect day," she went on dreamily; "don't you recall how the sun tipped that white sail with rose?"

"The world was rose-colored to me!"

he retorted.

"Did you know that Lady Bently is marrying again?" she asked absently.

"The chaperon?" he exclaimed. "If ever a man wanted her removal by marriage or sudden death, I did!"

"You're wicked!" she said.

Lily! I hope she'll be happy."

"So do I," he replied devoutly, "and stay in England."

She broke off a bit of white lilac.

"I wonder if no one has told you," she said softly; "I am going to be married, Captain Crenyon."

Crenyon looked at her strangely.

"No one told me." he answered mechanically. "I wish you happiness, Princess Xenia."

Her lips quivered, and suddenly she hid her face in her hands and he heard

her weeping.

"Perhaps you will tell me his name," he said harshly. "The name of the man you love."

She brushed the tears from her eyes.

"That I shall not, Captain Crenyon," she replied; "never—never!" and she swept away up the path to the house.

On the ground lay the white lilac she had cast aside as she had cast aside his love; and he had traveled half across the world to see her again!

### H.

MORITZSKY was drinking iced tea in his library when his guest came in from the garden and Crenyon asked him about the Duma. He laughed scornfully.

"They are giving the Czar indigestion," he replied. "Let them sow the tares and reap the whirlwind. Fools and muzhiks!"

His guest helped himself to a glass of

"It will probably be you who will reap the whirlwind," he remarked teasingly. "This is dawn in Russia."

"Dawn for the anarch!" Moritzsky said tartly. "Bah! Crenyon, tell me, instead, where you met the Princess Xenia?"

Crenyon stirred his tea slowly.

"I met the Princess Ivanoff in Monaco," he replied at last; "and, by the way, isn't this weather unusually hot for St. Petersburg?"

Moritzsky laughed.

"My dear fellow, the Princess Xenia usually makes it summer-time," he said maliciously.

"I hear she is to be married," Crenyon observed, with fine indifference.

"Ah! she told you, then," Moritzsky said; "it has only been whispered here. She is to marry General Roditchev."

"An old love-affair?" Crenyon suggested.

The Russian laughed.

"She hates him," he replied. "It's her brother; you know the story?"

"I know nothing," Crenyon retorted

grimly.

"Her brother is a fool, tainted with this heresy," Moritzsky explained; "there it is in a nutshell. He got in with these revolutionists, was drawn by lot to kill Ushakoff, attempted it, failed, and escaped by the aid, as we all know, of his sister, and has since eluded the police, but they're hot on his trail. It's whispered that this man Roditchev has some clue—that her brother's life is the price she pays."

The American tossed his cigarette out of the window and faced him squarely.

"Is it possible," he demanded, "that there is such a knave unhung?"

Moritzsky's shrug answered him.

"I need not ask another question; this is the lode-star which drew you to the north! The princess is a charming girl, but she will marry—Roditchev."

"Her brother permitting the sacrifice?" Crenyon asked indignantly.

"Her brother, Prince Basil, is the most selfish young man unhung," replied Moritzsky coldly. "They say she would buy his freedom with her own, and Roditchev is wealthy, high-placed, secure. What would you? It's the common lot of women."

Crenyon turned his back on him, quelling a sudden passionate desire to wring his neck.

"Who is this Roditchev?" he asked at last. "What power has he to terrorize a girl who must be his superior in birth

and social place?"

"His superior by birth," replied Moritzsky placidly, "and in social position, I admit, but in power—no, a thousand times no! It is true that there are men of higher rank, but what if she prefers Roditchev? He is a power, and has been second only to military dictator. I've heard men say that whenever he changed his cuff-buttons he shook down a dozen police spies from his sleeves."

Moritzsky smiled pleasantly.

"My dear fellow," he added, "have some strawberries, and beware of Roditchev."

An hour later a servant brought Crenyon a letter addressed in that pretty flowing hand with which he had once been happily acquainted. There were only a few lines, and they read:

Forgive me; I did not mean it. I was foolish. My aunt is at home in the evening; will you come to see us? It is

true, of course, that I am to marry General Roditchev. XENIA.

THE house of Prince Sergius Ivanoff was brilliantly lighted, and the prince and princess were receiving their guests in the great salon. In the midst of the throng Crenyon discerned the Princess Xenia holding a court of her own.

She turned and saw him, and again there was a swift change in her face; but it was gone in an instant, and she held out her hand, greeting him in her pretty,

precise English.

"I did not know until to-day that you were my neighbor," she said, "and the guest of my cousin, Ivan Sergheivitch."

"Nor did I know until to-day that the sun rises on the west side of Moritzsky's house," he replied.

She laughed softly.

"I have been away from home," she

explained.

"And I have been in exile," he observed, unruffled by the curiosity of her admirers.

He offered her his arm.

"Will you show me the way to Moritz-

sky's gate?" he asked.

She blushed, for the moment disconcerted; then a sudden terror came into her eyes as they fixed themselves on some object over his shoulder. She turned and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Let us try to find it, Captain Crenyon," she said, smiling with quivering

He made way for her, and they passed through the gay groups of her guests; but he had seen the man whose entrance had caused her sudden pallor, and he had no doubt that it was Roditchev. Reaching the long window at the end of the salon, he lifted the curtain and she passed out on to the moonlit terrace, and he followed her without a word.

Once there, her assumed dropped from her like a mantle and she stood silent, looking down into the shadowy garden. The moonlight was on the soft folds of her white gown and the ivory whiteness of her cheek and shoulders.

"It is a great sacrifice," Crenyon said slowly, "and it will not save your brother."

She gave him a startled look.

"You know?" she exclaimed, in an

undertone. "Who told you?"
"You did," he said quietly. "Do you think that you can cheat me into believing that you are happy? For the rest. it is easy to learn."

"Too easy!" she said sadly. "I am not a revolutionist, but one can hide noth-

ing in St. Petersburg."

'Would you have hidden it from me?" he asked.

"Most of all from you!" she answered.

Her emphasis gave him a sharp twinge of hope.

"Xenia," he said softly, "a year ago

I thought you cared a little."

Her lips quivered, but she said noth-

"I'm determined that this man shall not make you wretched," he went on, "if I have to turn anarchist myself."

She started.

"Hush!" she whispered; Heaven's sake-my poor brother!"

Crenyon caught her hands and held

"Xenia," he whispered, "do you know where he is?"

She framed "No" with her lips, and then murmured softly: "Roditchey knows."

"And uses his knowledge for this?" he exclaimed.

She looked over her shoulder.

"I must go," she exclaimed; "I have my part to play, but tell me how you knew. Was it my cousin?"

"Partly, and partly what I have seen. I mean to find your brother," he added.

She looked at him with a flash of hope in her wonderful eyes, but shook her

"You cannot," she said; "and if you did, you could not help him."

"Nor can Roditchev," he said bru-

tally.

"He can do much," she rejoined, "more than any other living man."

"And for that you marry him?" he asked bitterly.

She clasped her hands tightly.

"For that?" he repeated. "For that fiction?"

"It is not a fiction," she replied; "if I do not, he will give Basil up. There

is no plea on earth to save him, poor, foolish boy!"

"There is the Czar," Crenyon sug-

gested.

She threw out her hands with a gesture of despair.

"The poor Czar!" she murmured.

There was a stir in the room behind them, and again she looked over her shoulder.

"There is one of the grand dukes now, and I am the hostess. What a bitter farce life is!"

"It will be more bitter if you marry that man," he said harshly; "there is no sense or reason in it!"

Her face was ineffably sad.

"There is this reason in it," she replied; "I should feel myself a murderer; he would give my brother up."

"You believe that he has him in his

hands?" Crenyon asked quickly.

"I believe that he has him in his

power," she replied.

"He tells you that to threaten you," Crenyon said angrily. "I will not permit such a thing; I will find a way, Xenia!"

He caught her hand and drew her gently toward him.

"Xenia," he whispered, "do you remember that day in Venice?"

She shook her head.

"I must remember nothing," she said, and then softly: "Forgive me---"

For a moment they looked into each other's eyes; then some one spoke from the window, and she turned and left him.

Crenvon stood a while on the terrace watching her; she had never looked more beautiful, and then, when he saw Roditchev approaching, he left the terrace, and going through the garden, got the gate open and went into Moritzsky's house, determined to escape the ordeal of watching Roditchev receive congratula-

### IV.

IT was three weeks after this before Crenyon got his letter of introduction to Roditchev. His old friend Beauchamps, of the British embassy, gave it with a laughing warning that Roditchev was a devil, with the smoothest tongue in St. Petersburg.

It was six o'clock when the American

reached the general's house, and a scarlet-coated lackey admitted him, showing him into a small room to the right of the door.

Left to his own devices, Crenyon made a study of the room. It had two doors, one into the hall and a low one behind the mantel. Satisfied that he was alone. he took out his revolver and examined it carefully, putting it back into his pocket when he heard the servant returning.

The man informed him that General Roditchev had gone out without his

knowledge.

As he spoke, Crenyon discovered that he was no stranger, but the same fellow who had been valet to Moritzsky three years before.

"Ah, Lodtz," he said, in French, "you

have changed masters?"

The fellow was evidently discomfited

by the recognition.

"I was sorry to leave the count, monsieur." he replied, "but I couldn't go with him to Paris last year, and he filled my place."

Crenyon had not budged from his chair, and he saw Lodtz glance uneasily

toward the door.

"You find the general's service lucrative?" he suggested easily.

"His excellency is liberal, monsicur,"

the man replied.

"A most interesting man, I'm told," Crenyon said.

Lodtz shot a quick look at him. "Yes, monsicur."

Crenyon leaned forward.

"Lodtz," he said, "in which room is he keeping Prince Basil Ivanoff?"

The man started violently and stood staring. His attitude and expression at once assured Crenyon that he was right in his supposition.

He rose, and with a swift movement shut the door into the hall and locked it.

"Now, Lodtz," he went on sharply, pointing to the chimney door, "you will take me through that door into Prince Ivanoff's prison."

Lodtz started back.

"I dare not, monsieur!" he whim-

The American whipped out his pistol and covered him.

"No!" he said, "you are not going without me.'

The valet had intended to elude him. but stopped with an expression of helpless despair. Crenyon put his hand on his shoulder.

"Come!" he said; "the way to Prince Ivanoff!"

Lodtz set his teeth in obstinate silence. Crenvon lifted his pistol deliberately to the level of his ear.

"Go on!" he said.

The valet turned and looked into the pistol with terror in his eves.

"It's as much as my life is worth,

monsieur!" he pleaded abjectly.

"Precisely; either way," Crenyon said coolly; "you have a hard choice, Lodtz. I'll give you until I can count five. One-two-three-"

"Monsieur! monsieur! they would take you red-handed!" the man cried.

"Four-" the American counted slowly.

"Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" the other moaned. "I go, monsieur!"
"At once!" said Crenyon grimly.

The valet made a despairing gesture and walked sidewise to the door and opened it, not by the handle, but by running his fingers down the panel until he touched some spring, and they walked out into a passage. It led to a short flight of stairs, along another hall, and down more steps.

They continued on about five yards, and then Lodtz halted before a door.

"Open it," Crenyon commanded.

The valet searched his pockets for a key, found it, and fitted it in the lock. The door fell open on utter darkness, but Lodtz turned the switch of the electric light, which was outside the door, and it flared up, revealing a young man sitting on the side of a narrow bed.

Crenyon had seen Basil Ivanoff only once, but he recognized the likeness to his sister even in that first glimpse. He did not enter, but stood watching Lodtz.

"Prince," he said in English, "I am a friend. You will follow me; I mean to get you out."

Ivanoff understood him, and rose, muttering something inaudible.

"Right about face!" Crenyon said to Lodtz, making him precede them.

He went with such alacrity that the American suspected an eagerness to trap them.

"I am Captain Crenvon, an American," he explained to the prince. "I know your sister; you can trust me."

"Sir, if you were the devil I should take the chance," replied the prince.

They were now on the second flight of stairs, and close to the door by which they had entered. Crenyon touched Lodtz on the arm.

"Where is the street-door?" he asked. Lodtz gave him a strange look, turned, and pressing his fingers against an apparently blank wall, caused a door to open inward. He entered, and Crenyon hesitated an instant. To go back was hopeless; they were compelled to trust

Gripping his revolver, the American followed, with the young prince at his elbow. Scarcely had they entered, however, before the door closed behind them with a snap and they knew that they were trapped. At the same moment Lodtz almost fell through the door in front of them to escape Crenyon's pistol.

As it opened, a glare of light revealed General Roditchev sitting at a desk engaged in talk with a young man in the poor dress of a mechanic. Crenyon was conscious that Ivanoff leaped back, but before he could act, before Lodtz spoke, the stranger sprang on Roditchev and two pistol-shots cracked at once.

As the smoke cleared, Roditchev fell forward to the floor and Lodtz came to his knees with a cry, having received the general's bullet.

It was over in a trice, and the murderer rushed to a window and leaped into the street.

"Come!" Crenyon exclaimed Ivanoff.

But the prince caught his arm. "Stay!" he whispered; "we have not

It was true; already there was a rush at the entrance, and Lodtz fell, dying, to the floor. .

Three or four men of the household burst into the room just as Crenyon shut the door upon the alcove where they stood. He found a key, locked it on their side, and they remained in a narrow space, trapped, if they could not find the secret of the door behind them.

They could hear exclamations and.

cries of alarm, but were in darkness, and the place seemed suddenly suffocating. Crenyon heard the prince trying to find the secret of the lock, and turned to aid him.

They could not hope to be long undiscovered, but as yet there was only a Babel of voices, and Ivanoff and Crenyon searched and fumbled for the spring. The place grew more stifling; for once they knew the feeling of trapped rats.

Crenyon set his teeth and pressed his fingers down the panel; at the same instant the door gave and they nearly fell into the hall. They could hear hurrying footsteps, and voices in the

distance.

"We're well trapped!" Crenyon exclaimed in an undertone. "Even if we reached the street, we should find our way barred."

Ivanoff shook his head.

"No," he said; "they'll think that Lodtz shot him; I saw the assassin drop his pistol by the valet as he ran."

They were standing near the alcove, and the switch of the electric light was above his shoulder. As Ivanoff ceased speaking both heard a door whine and a step in the hall where they stood.

In a flash Crenyon turned the switch and they were in darkness, but across the hall shone a broad band of light. Some one had come in by another door. They heard a man's impatient exclamation.

"Lodtz!" he called sharply.

He was coming toward them fumbling for the switch. They backed against the wall opposite and waited, and he came on, feeling his way on the other side. They could hear him breathe as he passed.

With a common impulse, both sprang for the lighted entry, reached it, and Crenyon closed the door behind them.

"Quick!" cried Basil.

They dashed down three steps, found a bolt, shot it back, and in a moment were in the street.

### V.

A SHAFT of light from the wide window shone on the top of the white lilacs in Prince Ivanoff's garden, and Crenyon saw Xenia coming toward him. It was a week since he had brought her brother back, and the death of Roditchev was laid at the door of Lodtz.

What Roditchev's household knew no one ever surmised. It had been announced that the Princess Xenia was

mourning for her fiancé.

As she came toward Crenyon the light shone on her face, revealing it in beau-

tiful repose.

"I know not how to thank you," she said softly. "Basil is safe. But for you, had this happened to Roditchev—" She broke off with a shudder.

"Did you love him, princess?" Cren-

yon asked abruptly.

"Do not tempt me to speak of him," she answered quietly; "he is dead."

There was a sudden silence, more eloquent than words. Then her voice: "Basil is in Switzerland, and I—I shall go there soon to see him."

"To Switzerland?" he repeated. Then he leaned forward. "Why not farther, Xenia?" he whispered. "Why

not to America?"

The princess blushed, and her lips trembled; her eyes shone like two stars.

"To America?" she faltered. "The ocean is wide, the way is long, and

yet----

"And yet it is the heart's highway," he said; "the way is short for two to travel—on a wedding journey. Xenia. will you travel it with me?"

"Ah," she murmured, very low, "it seems that I can travel no other way—

henceforth—but with you!"

### FLOWER IN THE CRANNIED WALL.

FLOWER in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

# DOWN AND OUT.\*

### BY LAWRENCE G. BYRD.

The appalling consequences of a misunderstanding in the matter of table-legs; being the tale of an unhappy aspirant to high living.

### SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

"Wib" Harris, twenty-two, extravagant, and salesman for the furniture house of McCann & Lowther, falls into debt, especially to his tailor, Lomark. He expects to recoup on the strength of the sale of a made-to-order table to Mr. Peter Ware, eccentric millionaire; but because of an alleged mistake in the construction of the table, Ware refuses to accept it, throws it back on the firm, and Wib is told that he must stand the loss. His endeavors to prove this unjust are vain, since Adrian Lowther, nephew of the junior partner and in bad odor, who is the only man who might help him, has mysteriously disappeared.

Wib's trouble is increased by Lomark's threatening suit. He feels himself in extreme disgrace and jeopardy. The only one who gives him sympathy is a little lunch-counter waitress whose brother has been "sent up" for "making a touch." That day Wib receives a communication from Crosscup & Fysher, lawyers, saying that unless payment of his debt to Lomark is made within three days execution will be issued to the sheriff.

### CHAPTER VII.

A SCENE WITH HIS PERSECUTOR.

HERE is no experience so lonely as that of the friendless person in a big city.

Wib had neglected some friends to whom, in this trouble, he might havegone for sympathy, at least. But among all his acquaintances there was not one from whom he could have asked advice.

He had lived a remarkably self-contained life. There had been little sympathy between him and the uncle and aunt who had brought him up, and Wib never had made confidential chums of his school friends.

He knew no person in the remotest way connected with the law. He had never looked into a volume of the statutes "made and provided" of his State. And this ignorance regarding such matters is more widely spread than one would think, unless one has looked carefully into it.

Listen once to a group of laymen discussing some point of law, and the listener will hear more wild and improbable readings of a simple statute than ever disgraced the backwoods courts of Missouri in ante-bellum days!

This ignorance is increased by the lack of uniformity in the statutes of the several States. A man brought up in the belief that a certain law means so-and-so moves to another State and suddenly finds himself butting into trouble because the law named reads entirely different in the State of his present residence.

But this is aside. In Wib's case, the threat of the lawyers to issue "execution" to the sheriff filled him with actual physical horror. It might as well have read "assassination," instead of "execution," so far as his appreciation of the meaning was concerned.

And it seemed to him at that moment as though death would really be far preferable to the unknown which waited for him three days hence.

The whole burden of his thought finally established itself in this one question: Could he be jailed for debt? Wib Harris felt that he should go mad if he did not have that insistent query answered.

He got up shaking, bathed his face and eyes in the water from his pitcher,

"This story began in the December issue of Thi: Argory, which will be mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents.

involuntarily dressed himself in the very suit of clothes for which Lomark was suing him, and went out of the house. He caught himself peering up and down the darkened street before he ventured from the vestibule, on the watch for somebody to arrest him.

Where should he go? To whom apply for information of a nature that he actually did not dare ask for? His state of mind was really pitiable, and not to be scorned too harshly by men of

more rugged temperament.

He wandered about without any goal in view, but finally found himself uptown and on better-lighted and busier streets. The evening crowd was at its liveliest, the theaters alight, the hotels backoning. At a popular corner he ran into Blossom.

"Hullo, Wib!" was his greeting, and the latter knew by his acquaintance's manner that news of the tailor's suit against him had not reached Blossom, at least. "Where away?"

Wib muttered something about being

out only for a walk.

"Come in and smile," suggested Blossom, taking his arm and turning the furniture salesman toward a café.

Harris eschewed stimulants, usually, but in his present desperate condition of mind he seized the suggestion gladly. They sat down and gave their orders to the waiter.

"By the way," said Blossom, puffing on his cigar, "where's Adrian these days?"

"Adrian Lowther?"

"Of course. I haven't seen him for a dog's age."

"Neither have I," muttered Wib.

"He's out of town, I believe."

"Humph! I heard he was going it rather high. His uncle's soured on him, has he?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Why, you know, Adrian's dependent upon old Uncle Mark for his pinmoney; and the last time I saw Adrian he admitted he was up to his neck in debt. He owes me a hundred—poor devil!"

Wib actually shivered. Blossom was one of the few club-men he knew who was careful with his money and always had plenty. He spoke of that hundred dollars as he knocked the ashes off his cigar-end—with the same nonchalance.

Yet a hundred dollars would more than save Wib Harris from—well, Wib didn't know just what it would be, but

from something awful!

However, to ask Blossom to lend him money enough to pay Lomark and settle the costs of the action he had brought never entered Wib's mind as a reasonable suggestion. Blossom might lend to a high-roller like Adrian, who came of wealthy people, and whose uncle was good for almost any amount; but the instant he hinted such a thing to Blossom, Wib knew the fellow would get up and leave him.

"Do you suppose young Mr. Lowther has left town because of his debts?"

he asked hesitatingly.

"Maybe. Can't tell. He talked once about going West—his uncle's idea, I think. You know, Adrian is 'mama's boy,' and the old lady never can see anything crooked in him. Uncle Mark is no lobster, however, and I fancy Fallowsea was getting hot for Adrian. Perhaps he's got out of the State for a while."

Wib saw his chance and grabbed it

excitedly.

"You don't mean that they can jail a man for debt in this State?"

"Humph! Guess not—not a fellow like Adrian. He's got too many friends."

"But is there a law to that effect?"

persisted Wib.

"Now—let—me—see," said Blossom slowly, and sipping his cordial with an air of careless ease that increased Wib's

anxiety enormously.

"Somewhere I heard that discussed lately—why, yes! At the dinner-table, last night. You know, my brother's a lawyer-sharp. There is a way these shyster lawyers get a man behind the bars—poor devils who can't, or won't, satisfy a judgment, I mean. If I remember right, he said there were two ways.

"One is by proving to the satisfaction of the judge that the debtor, when ordered to pay, has means to do so, but won't. Then the judge orders his con-

finement for contempt.

"The other and more common way

is for the plaintiff's lawver to go into court and declare that the defendant in the suit is about to skip the State. body attachment is issued then, and the sheriff shuts the poor devil up. either case, I believe, the plaintiff has to pay the defendant's board in the county jail.

"By Jove, Wib! what's the matter with you? You look as white as death."

"I-I guess I'll get out in the air. Tha-thanks!" murmured Wib. made a break for the door.

He ran to shake off Blossom's friendly pursuit. He hurried around the corner into a dark and almost deserted street. There he broke into hysterical sobs, and ran on, wringing his hands, the hot tears coursing down his cheeks.

Fear of the shame that menaced him had finally broken his spirit completely. He crept home like a wounded dog and hid himself away in his little room. His travail of soul was as great a torment that night as though he faced execution on the morrow.

It was the young fellow's pride being crucified, and that, while it lasts, is as hard a thing to bear as a man of Wib's temperament ever meets in life.

In the morning he knew what he must There was one chance remaining. .Ie must see Lomark and beg a respite. Otherwise, he knew that the tailor's lawyers would find some means of disgracing him beyond repair.

He knew, vaguely, that a good lawyer could probably save him from the catastrophe that threatened. But Wib had barely car-fare left out of his salary; he could not engage counsel to look out

for his interests.

He was too wretched to go to work, and Lomark, he knew, would be at his store early. But when he came in sight of the tailor's place he was in such a nervous tremor that he had to walk up and down the block several times to get control of himself.

Every moment he put the interview off increased his distaste for it; he feared his last atom of courage would evaporate if he did not present himself before the tailor instantly. So it was that he rushed into the shop like a person whose mind was affected and demanded to see the proprietor.

The clerks stared at him, and one went slowly in search of Lomark. Wib had to endure the observation of the others while he waited. Their grins and whispers (for they all knew him and his business with the tailor) did more in helping the young man gain control of himself than anything else.

A black rage began to be distilled in his heart and mind. He clenched his hands until the nails bit into the palms. He could have seized the first and nearest weapon and run amuck among those

hatefully grinning fellows!

When Lomark sauntered up, twirling his waxed mustache and smiling uncertainly, Wilbur Harris was as cold as ice and in a dangerous mood. There was no fear of his breaking down before his persecutor; his nerve was quite recov-

"Mr. Lomark," he began, and the evenness of his voice surprised him-"Mr. Lomark, I am informed by your lawyers that you have obtained a judgment in the city court against me for the

amount of your bill and costs.

"I have always intended to pay you this bill, and intend to do so now-as soon as I can. Your recording a judgment against me will not help me do this-it may retard me, in fact, if my employers hear of it; but I hope you will go no further, and be patient until I am in a position to settle."

While Wib was speaking Mr. Lomark's appearance had vastly changed. His sallow face flushed, and his little eyes sparkled with rage. Now he stepped close to the young man and fairly hissed his reply into Wib's facewith an emphasis that forced the young

man back a step.

"Patient! Vait! I'll not vait a minute longer than the law says I must. I'll get satisfaction out of you-yes! It is not money I vant-I vill revenge me meinself for your insults.

dog!"

He spat, in his hateful foreign manner, upon the floor at Wib's feet. The man's face was so devilish, and his insulting words and manner so stirred the boy's rage, that had not two of the clerks rushed between them he would have seized Lomark's skinny throat and squeezed his breath from his body.

He was in a deadly, uncontrollable No more was he the weak and rage! vacillating youth who had trembled and wept at the unknown shame which threatened him; he saw Lomark through a blood-red haze, and fought to reach him like a madman.

Wib Harris, who had shrunk in such horror from arrest on a civil case, now put himself in jeopardy of being jailed on a criminal charge. One of Lomark's clerks shouted for the police and ran to call up the station on the telephone; but the others hustled the young man out of the shop and fairly threw him upon the sidewalk.

Numbers only had overpowered him, and Wib went away breathing vengeance

against the whole crowd.

It was some moments before he recovered himself sufficiently to realize that he was attracting attention by swinging his clenched fists and muttering. He pulled himself together and hastened to his work.

He had done his best with Lomark, he told himself. The man was after revenge, not money, and he might expect no mercy from him. Indeed, he craved none now. Let the scoundrel do With his awakening from his worst. the torpor of fear which had bound him heretofore had come a spirit of sullen recklessness not at all natural to Wilbur Harris.

He accepted as final the fact that remained but one hope for Adrian Lowther must help him. Whether it cost him his place with Mc-Cann & Lowther or not, Adrian must be found and made to testify regarding Mr. Peter Ware's order.

By proving that the mistake had not been his, Wib could lawfully claim his commissions, which now amounted to more than enough to settle the judgment Crosscup & Fysher had obtained for their client.

Adrian Lowther must be found.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

"HAVING IT OUT."

IT was the missing man's uncle who met the belated salesman when he entered the side door of McCann & Low-

It was past nine ther's emporium. o'clock.

"Why are you late, Harris?" demanded the junior partner, with a scowl that would have done credit to McCann himself. "You would better be more prompt if you wish to keep your position with us."

"I am seldom late, Mr. Lowther: it was unavoidable this morning," said Wib, respectfully.

But his eyes flashed; he was in no mood to endure Lowther's cheap bully-

"You're out too much at night," snapped the other. "I hear of you at dances and places of amusement. You attend to business a little closer and vou won't make another such mistake as you did about Mr. Ware's table. We've just got it back from the manufacturer, and the truckmen will take it up to-day. Consider what trouble you made the firm-"

"Wait a moment, sir!" interrupted Wib. "I don't admit that I did anything of the kind. I am being charged for a loss that was not my fault. When your nephew returns----"

"Stop it!" commanded Lowther hot-"Don't let me hear anything about that again. My nephew knows nothing about the business."

"You'll find out that he does," declared Wib firmly. "I shall ask him to tell you and Mr. McCann just what he remembers about the order the moment I can find him."

"You—you dare to look for him. Harris!" gasped Lowther, livid with rage. "I-I- If you dare speak of this again in my presence, or if I hear of your making any attempt to see my nephew, you shall be discharged, sir -discharged! Do you understand?"

He gave Wib no opportunity for reply, but rushed off to his private office and slammed the door. But Wib had come to a place now where browbeat-

ing did not make him tremble.

Something Lowther had said aroused his suspicions, too. Could it be possible that Adrian was not out of town, after all? He had already suspected a mystery regarding the young man's

Lowther said that if he, Wib, made

any attempt to see Adrian he would be discharged. Did that mean that young Lowther was hiding, for some reason, at home?

Wib was in a desperate situation. He had less than three days to satisfy the judgment recorded against him; he felt that he must risk discharge, if need be, to find Adrian Lowther.

And after an interview that he had during the lunch-hour with Bella at the restaurant he was more than ever determined to risk everything in an attempt to see the junior partner's nephew.

When Wib came into the lunch-room, that noon, Bella signaled him to wait till the rush was over.

"I got somet'ing to tell you," she whispered.

So he ate more slowly than usual, and finally saw the near-by customers thin out. At her first opportunity Bella stopped to talk.

"I went up there yesterday," she

said.

"Up where?"

"To see Jimmy—you know. 'Twas Wednesday. I took him up some 'tuck' from the hash-house. They let the friends of the jail prisoners bring 'em grub, and after the officers go t'rough it to see dat there ain't no saws and crowbars in the pie they gives it to the poor chaps. Jimmy says the reg'lar eatin' is somet'ing fierce!"

"Oh, up to Brandon, you mean?" queried Wib, trying to repress a physical shiver at the thought of the place.

"Yep. You know, they lets us talk to our friends t'rough a screen—it's like feedin' the animals in a menagerie, I tells Jimmy. An' they cut his hair clos't, an' the clo'es they give him to wear is hand-me-downs from some odder prisoner. It's only the long-term men dat gits new duds there.

"But, say! dat ain't what I was goin' to tell ye," added Bella, passing a man across the aisle a piece of pie and punching his check. "You wait. I was rememberin' youse.

"I asked Jimmy," she whispered, "if there was any folks in there for owin' people, an' he says there is!"

Wib nodded, and gulped down a morsel of cruller that came near to choking him.

"There's a dozen or more there now. One old feller's been there t'ree years. He won't take the oat'."

"What's that?"

"The poor-debtor's oat'. Jimmy says if a feller's sent up for debt he kin git out after a week by takin' dis oat'—swearin' that he don't have no money, an' never expects to have none—'r somet'in' like dat. Chee! it's tough on youse if dey jugs ye."

"And-and these debtors are really

kept in cells?"

"Yep. Nights, anyway. Jimmy says they calls 'em boarders, but dat dey eat jest what he gits, only dey have sweetenin' in their drink, an' t'ree meals on Sund'y instead of two. He says the convicts—the long-term fellers, like murderers—gits better grub than the county-jail prisoners. Oh, dat place ain't no roof-garden, you kin bet. You wanter dodge it."

The stern eye of the "boss" here interrupted Bella's flow of language, and Wib went away, fearing to be called down again by either Lowther or McCann if he exceeded his time limit.

But all the afternoon the girl's story buzzed in his mind. It strengthened his purpose to make desperate search for Adrian Lowther, come what would of it.

He was reckless of consequences now. Let McCann & Lowther discharge him if they would. They might as well, if they were determined to rob him of his commissions and one hundred and eighty-five dollars besides.

That evening he dressed himself again and started up-town. He knew where Adrian Lowther resided; the directory told him that. The house was on a quiet street in one of the best neighborhoods of the fashionable quarter of Fallowsea.

Adrian's father—younger brother to the junior partner in the furniture firm—had been unfortunate in business just prior to his death, and had left his wife with only a small annuity, and his son to the care of Mark Lowther. So much information regarding the Lowthers was public property.

Wib took the car up-town, and at a certain busy corner changed to the Belt Line. When he boarded this second car and seated himself gloomily in the far

end, he was suddenly awakened from his unhappy reverie by a sharp tap on his knee. He looked up to see opposite him the shrewd, lean old face of Mr. Peter Ware, monocle at eye, and his slender stick, used to call Wib's attention

"Well, young man!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "So we meet again? That table has finally been delivered, and I must say that it satisfies me in every particular. You may tell Messrs. McCann & Lowther so with my compliments—and that my check will follow," and he laughed.

"I am glad you are satisfied," returned Wib sharply. "I wish I could

say as much, sir."

"Eh? what's that?" demanded Ware.

"What do you mean?"

"I am not at all satisfied that I should pay McCann & Lowther the one hundred and eighty-five dollars which they claim it has cost them to rectify the mistake."

"Well, I declare! do they really

mean to make you pay it?"

"So they say. Out of my future commissions, and by deducting half my salary. And let me tell you it has put me in a nice hole," said Wib, taking no pains to conceal his anger.

"Humph! Seems to me that is rather small potatoes for a big firm like that; but you deserve it, perhaps. It will be a good lesson to you. One cannot be too careful in transmitting an

order-"

"See here, Mr. Ware!" exclaimed Wib, standing up so as to get nearer to the old gentleman, and speaking in a lower tone, "I don't suppose it ever crossed your mind that you might have made a mistake in this affair?"

"How's that?" and Ware's voice became metallic, and his eyes snapped.

"Yes, sir. I mean that, exactly. It is a question of memory, anyway—I almost said veracity—between us. You claim you ordered lion paws. I declare that you never said a word about paws, but that, on the contrary, you distinctly ordered lion heads in place of the dragon heads and claws on the other table."

"What, sir!" gasped Ware, jumping up in turn, and not at all careful to

lower his voice, so that the other passengers in the car were attracted by his vehemence. "You—you are insulting, sir."

"I am not. I don't mean to be. But I am being wronged—bitterly wronged. This means more to me than I can explain to you, Mr. Ware. The sum doesn't seem much to you, perhaps, but it will be my ruin if you insist that I made the mistake."

"Why, sir, you intimate that I am in fault in this thing," cried Ware. "I'll—I'll see Messrs. McCann & Low-

ther about this."

"Well, you can't do me any more harm than you have already with them," declared Wib hopelessly. "And I might as well have it out with you, anyway. You're wrong and I'm right; and if I can get hold of Adrian Lowther I'll prove it."

Mr. Ware, sputtering in anger, and gripping his stick as though he was tempted to use it on his young antagonist, had already turned toward the door

of the car.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded, looking back. "Why do you bring that disreputable young cub into the discussion?"

"Because he stood by and heard it all. He heard you give the order, and saw me write it down. He will be able to prove that I wrote exactly as you dictated."

"Why, confound him! I wouldn't

take his word on oath."

"Well, the firm may. I tell you, Mr. Ware, if he can't come forward and tell the truth about this, I'm ruined—that's all there is to it. It's little you care, I suppose——"

"Here, youse fellers! Go outside if ye want to fight!" exclaimed the conductor, seeing Ware raise his cane again

threateningly.

The old gentleman's face, pale the moment before with rage, was suddenly suffused with shame, and muttering some execration upon his obstinate antagonist he quickly left the car.

"Well, by Jove! I've had it out with him, anyway," thought Wib, sinking into his seat again and avoiding the curious glances of the other passengers. "There's some satisfaction in that."

In his heart, however, he well knew that he had not aided his cause in the least. He had merely made of Mr. Peter Ware another enemy.

### CHAPTER IX.

WIB IS PUZZLED AND DISCHARGED.

HE left the car as near as possible to the house which Adrian Lowther and his mother were supposed to occupy. Knowing absolutely nothing of the private life of the young man, but spurred by necessity to demand an interview with him. Harris approached the place with grim intent.

This was a reckless resolve he had taken; he needed not to be told that. It foredoomed his discharge from the employ of McCann & Lowther. would be kicked out of his situation, as Lowther had threatened, if Adrian

"gave him away."

Believing in the careless good nature of the fellow, however, Wib hoped to impress him so strongly with his situation that Adrian would help him without adding to his troubles.

"He can save me-actually save me," thought Wib, over and over again, "and without any trouble to himself. Cann & Lowther will have to take his word, whether they desire to or not.

"Of course, under no circumstances now could Mr. Ware be made to see that it was his mistake. But surely my declaration backed by Adrian's testi-

mony will convince the firm.

"I don't care, then, if Mr. Lowther discharges me or not. And he probably will. I shall demand the commissions due me, and once I get the money and settle this Lomark business I'm willing to look for another situation.

And, by Jove!" Wib added forcibly, "once let me clear off this debt and I'll never contract one for a postage

stamp again."

He mounted the steps and rang the bell. A trim maid answered, and he put his question in just the way he had already planned:

"I suppose Mr. Adrian Lowther is expecting me. Will you take up my

card?"

The girl looked astonished.

"Mr. Lowther is away. He isn't in the city," she said. "Didn't you know?"

"Why, no!" Wib exclaimed, and instantly his ease of manner left him and his face paled. "You don't really mean

to say he hasn't returned?"

"No, sir. And we don't expect him for a long time, I believe. He's gone West-I know Mrs. Lowther received a letter from him this morning."

Wib grasped at this straw of chance. "I-I'd like to speak with Mrs. Lowther. Do you suppose she canwhy, of course! She'll know his address."

"Come in," said the maid.

take your card up to her."

Wib, seated in the hall, passed his handkerchief over a moist forehead. Adrian was really away—it would take days to reach him by mail-many hours to get a reply by wire, even. He felt his

last hope slipping from him.

Yet he would obtain Adrian's address and communicate with him as quickly as possible. Surely he might, even by wire, impress that young man with the grave necessity he felt for a quick response. The visitor was trying to arrange such a telegraph despatch in his mind when a little rustle on the stairs aroused him.

He looked up to see a diminutivealmost childish—figure descending the Mrs. Lowther was a doll-like woman, with a fresh face and dainty garments of a gaiety that showed she had long since left off her widow's weeds and did not consider herself an old person by any manner of means.

She came down, smiling softly, her still beautiful neck and arms bare, glittering rings on her tiny hands, the betraval of an exquisite foot in a pink satin slipper from beneath the hem of her silken skirt-altogether a picture of a lively, up-to-date, butterfly votary of the very smart set that Adrian himself affected.

"Mr. Harris?" she queried, smiling still at him, but with narrowing eyes examining his face, Wib thought, with strange attention. "You are anxious to see Adrian?"

"I am—yes, Mrs. Lowther. He can do me a favor-an important favor-. and with no trouble to himself; and I feel sure, if I can communicate with

him, that he will do it."

"I do-not-know," she responded hesitatingly and still staring at Wib. "You are one of his old friends, I suppose? One of the young men he has associated with? My brother-in-law tells me that some of you boys are very gay young men!" and she laughed lightlv. vet Wib still detected that undercurrent of alarm.

"I cannot claim to be a particular friend of your son," he said gravely, "but I esteem him highly—"

"Oh, I think most of his men friends do. Adrian is so jolly, you know! And he will be missed by you all, I am sure."

He saw that she seemed determined to class him with her son's familiar companions, so he hastened to get to his request.

"You can give me his address? I must communicate with him at once."

"Why, I might do so," she said slowly. "But to tell the truth, Mr. Harris, his Uncle Mark has placed me under a command—ha, ha! It sounds so unreasonable, I know," she added, yet her laugh was hollow and her fluttering hands betrayed her continued nervous-

"You see, his Uncle Mark believes that Adrian has been living altogether too gay a life. Of course, you understand, all Adrian's expectations are through my brother-in-law. obliged to sacrifice to our relatives at

"I hate to have Adrian away at all; but Mr. Lowther says it will be much better for him if he cuts free from all his present associations. I fear that means you, in part, Mr. Harris," she exclaimed, shaking a roguish finger at

"He is to 'live near to nature's heart' for some time. He is to cut off everybody here in Fallowsea. My! it will be awfully lonesome for me, you know. I

just dote on Adrian."

"But you can surely tell me where to write to him—or telegraph? I—I am in some difficulty, Mrs. Lowther," stammered Wib, "and he could help me out so easily."

"Why. I don't suppose there would be any objection to my telling you, under the circumstances. He isn't a good correspondent-never was. But I received a letter from him from Colfax only this morning-"

She was interrupted by a sharp ring at the door-bell. Without waiting for the appearance of the maid, Mrs. Lowther stepped to the front door and

opened it.

Wib turned and caught his breath suddenly. Mr. Mark Lowther walked into the hall.

"Good evening, Grace," he said suavely. "Thought I'd run in to see what you heard from the boy-"

He saw Harris, and stopped. His face flamed instantly, and then the color died slowly away as he approached the young man.

"What are you doing here?" he de-

manded sternly.

"Oh, do you know Mr. Harris?" queried the widow lightly. "One of Adrian's friends. He came to inquire---"

"To ask for Adrian's address—I quite understand," interposed Lowther harshly. "I presume you have remembered my instructions, Grace?"

"Why, I did not consider it any

harm-

"Have you given him Adrian's address?" sharply cried her brother-in-

"I was just about to," returned Mrs.

Lowther, pouting.

The man controlled himself, Wib saw, with a mighty effort. He laid his hand on Wib's arm and urged him toward

"I understand this man's motive in coming here, Grace. It is not a good one," he said hoarsely. "You will leave him to me."

He swung open the door. Without making a scene and perhaps frightening the lady, Wib did not see how he could break away from Mr. Lowther. He allowed himself to be led out.

"Harris!" exclaimed the gentleman sternly, "I warned you-I forbade you to come here. Let me tell you that you will not be admitted to the house again. And if you try to communicate with Mrs. Lowther-or with Adrianyou will suffer for it. Mind what I

sav

"And one other thing," added Lowther. "You have disobeyed me, and you have shown yourself to be an untrustworthy young man in other ways. I have not forgotten your uncalled-for visit to Mr. Ware.

"You are no longer an employee of mine. You are discharged! I shall see Mr. McCann the first thing in the morning, and if I have any influence with him, or any rights in the firm at all, you shall not work for us another day. You may go, sir!"

He flung aside Wib's arm, which he had held while speaking, and turning abruptly, opened the door, which he had held on the latch, and passed inside, shutting it sharply behind him before

Wib could utter a word.

### CHAPTER X.

THE NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK.

Wib was too greatly stunned to fly into such a passion as he had that morning in Lomark's place. But he was bitterly angry at Lowther, as well as bitterly disappointed in his failure, as he walked away from the house.

He saw plainly that he would not have a second chance—not right away, at least—to converse with Adrian's mother. Lowther would fend him off if

he sought to approach her.

His failure—when success was all but in his grasp—seemed complete, and his spirits sank to the bulb. His last chance was gone; his only hope of reaching Adrian and getting his testimony in time to save him from ruin was thwarted.

Besides, he had irrevocably injured himself with Lowther, and the junior partner surely had enough influence with McCann, as he had said, to force him

out of employment.

Now, if he managed to reach Adrian, that young man's testimony would have to be used in some legal suit to obtain Wib's commission. And the thought of going to law himself frightened the young salesman almost as much as the remembrance that he was being sued by the tailor.

Bella's story of the debtors in the county jail at Brandon stung his mind once more. Lomark, unless the fact that he would have to pay his enemy's board in the place made him hesitate, would be quite capable of sending him there, the young man was sure.

More than ever did Wib feel tempted to run away from it all. And yet, to run away a man must have more money, or better opportunity, than he seemed to

possess.

He was not of an adventuresome nature. The idea of starting out, with winter not so far in the prospect, afoot and penniless, to seek his fortune in some other place—some other State, if he would escape Lomark—had no attractions for him.

The getting of one's living seemed, after all, a serious business to Wib Harris. He had been a long time working up to his present situation with McCann & Lowther, and, sundering his connection with the firm in the way he was doing now, Wib believed that he would have a hard time getting an equally good position with any other furniture house.

"But what's the use of worrying about that?" he demanded of himself as he walked sullenly down-town. "Those shyster lawyers will put me where I won't be troubled by the need

of a situation.

"By Heaven! Can I remain idle and helpless while this awful thing threatens me? Adrian—there must be some way of reaching him. Ah! if old Lowther had been a minute later I'd have had the address from Adrian's mother."

The reiteration of this was his last thought as he fell into a troubled sleep that night. He awoke in the morning to find himself repeating, dully and without seeming sense, the word "Colfax."

"'Colfax'—who's Colfax?" he murmured. "I don't know anybody by that name. How did it get into my mind? I'd much better be trying to think up some likely firm to strike for a job. There isn't any Colfax in the furniture business in Fallowsea."

He was half dressed when the explanation smote him, and he dropped his hair-brushes with a shout.

"By Tove! that's it! That's where she said Adrian wrote from! She got that letter yesterday from Colfax, and Colfax must be a place, not a man. Colfax-Colfax. What State, I wonder?

"Out West, the girl said. But every State the other side of the Ohio might be West, and there may be more than one Colfax in the U.S.A. I'll look

it up."

The idea spurred him to brisk effort. He dodged his landlady (whom he knew was bound to remind him that he was in debt to her) by dodging breakfast. A cup of coffee and a roll taken at a corner stand sufficed him.

He went to the main post-office, and managed to get hold of a post-office directory. He knew no better way to get at the geographical situation of the town of Colfax. And when he beheld

the list his heart fell.

There was a Colfax in the town or county of Placer, California; Clinton, Indiana; Jasper, Iowa; Warren, Illinois; Mason, Michigan; Mower, Minnesota; Sullivan, Missouri; Fairfield, Ohio: Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, and Marion, West Virginia. All but the last two came under the category of Western towns, and Adrian Lowther might have written his mother from any one of eight.

Wib figured the thing out slowly as he wandered away from the post-office. A telegram of explanation, sent on chance to each of those towns, would cost—well, in his present circumstances,

"a small fortune"!

Besides, some of those towns might be of considerable size; how was he to reach Adrian amid a population of several thousand people—and Adrian possibly a total stranger in the place?

Telegraphing was out of the ques-He must fall back upon letterwriting, and he would be obliged to send a letter addressed to Adrian to each of the eight towns named Colfax

west of the Ohio River.

"I'll enclose them in a letter to the postmasters of the towns, requesting them to find Adrian, if possible—I'll do it!" he muttered, and hurried his steps toward his boarding-house.

As he entered he came face to face with the landlady, and with a sigh admitted to himself that he was "in for

"Mr. Harris," she said, eying him with the cold gaze that the successful boarding-house keeper knows so well how to assume—"Mr. Harris, I suppose you are in some sort of trouble. Have you lost your position?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have," admitted Wib.

"I was discharged last night."

"And you owe me for last week and this week-so far. I can't afford to have you increase the bill. Mr. Harris."

"I hope to obtain another position at once," he said, but his voice would

"I hope so. But I do not feel like waiting for my money. Haven't you

been paid?"

"There was nothing due me from my old employers. They-they stopped my salary because of a mistake they say I made."

"Humph! And you have no means

of paying me?"

Not just at present, Mrs. Kempt." "Well, Mr. Harris, you surely don't expect to remain here without paying,

do you?"
"Why—why, I will go away, if you wish me to," he stammered. "I hoped, as I had been here so long—"

"I find it is always the men who have been with me 'so long,' as you say, that get deepest into my debt-if I give them the chance," said Mrs. Kempt tartly. "You certainly will have to go, Mr. Harris. I can let your room at any time."

"Then I'll find a truckman and take away my things," the young fellow answered faintly. "I am sorry."

"Oh, so am I. But you know I can't afford to lose a penny. My rent is so dear. And as for your taking away your trunk, Mr. Harris," she added, as Wib started up the stairs, "I can't allow yo to do that, you know."

"What!" cried Wib, in surprise.

"I must hold your trunk until you can settle with me in full. You know I have a legal right to do that. I must be paid first."

Wib's face began to blaze, and his

voice now shook with anger.

"You can't mean that, Mrs. Kempt?" "I certainly do, sir," and she followed him up the stairs. "I shall see that you take nothing out of your room."

"But where can I go—what shall I do? This is disgraceful, Mrs. Kempt!"

"Don't you take that tone to me, young man," she snapped. "I know my business, I hope. It's you young whipper-snappers who live beyond your means and put all your money into clothes who are the bane of our lives. We lodging-house keepers have our troubles, now, I tell you!"

"But you will let me take some things, surely?" said Wib. "Some linen, and a change of clothes—just enough to get along with until I can come and pay you what I owe and get

my trunk?"

"You've got a hand-satchel. I'll see what you put into it, and then you can go—and I'll only charge you the eight dollars for last week, though I ought to have pay for these four days, too."

She stood grimly by, with folded arms, an avenging angel in black alpaca, while he hustled together with shaking hands a few necessary articles. Sullenly he descended the steps and moved away, his heart bitter against all mankind. This stroke seemed the cruelest of all.

Nevertheless, he had bethought him to put writing-materials in his bag with the collars and the few garments Mrs. Kempt had allowed him to take. Everything else he owned, aside from the clothes he stood in (and those belonged to Lomark, the tailor), he had jumbled into his trunk and left locked in the landlady's care.

He was too despondent to seek a room elsewhere just then. In fact, what explanation could he make to a new landlady? He could not pay a week's board in advance, and his experience with Mrs. Kempt assured him that he could not obtain credit unless he had baggage of more moment than a hand-satchel.

So he turned his steps to an hotel, checked his bag at the desk, and went into the writing-room, where he spent the remainder of the morning in writing the letters to Adrian. He made rather a full explanation to young Lowther of his difficulty—of the fact that he sorely needed to prove his case so as to obtain his commissions from McCann &

Lowther—and gave a true account of his visit to Adrian's mother against the command of Uncle Mark.

He hoped he had made the narrative strong enough to impress Adrian with his need. He did not say why he wanted the money so much; but if Adrian cared anything for the truth at all, and desired to help an unfortunate acquaintance at no cost to himself, he would surely reply.

That is, providing one of the letters reached him. When the eight copies were done and addressed, Wib wrote, briefly, eight notes to the eight postmasters, and after stamping them, sent them

on their way.

It was a bare chance; he knew that well enough. But it seemed the only thing he could do. What the next move of Lomark's lawyers would be he had no idea; but Wib knew well enough that he could get no reply to his letters before the next evening, which would close the period of this three days of grace.

After that, execution would be issued to the sheriff—whatever that might

mean.

He could not sit around all day and glower about his troubles, however. He was energetic. There was something to do, and he did it with vigor, if not with confidence.

After a hasty luncheon, he began the unfamiliar task of looking for work. Heretofore, in his limited experience, he had never resigned one position before being sure of another place.

But the knowledge that he absolutely needed employment contracted his throat and made his tongue stammer when he approached a possible employer. He had never realized before how hard it was to make this want known.

He began at once to find a difficulty of which he had not thought. The firms to whom he applied for work desired to know, with startling unanimity, why he had left McCann & Lowther. His reply that he had incurred the personal dislike of the junior partner did not, of course, satisfy in every case.

At one store where new salesmen were really needed the proprietor told Wib to call again, but to bring with him a recommendation from his former em-

ployers. It was a bitter dose to take, but Wib saw that he'd have to down it.

So, late in the afternoon he approach McCann & Lowther's store. Fortunately, he saw neither Lowther nor any of the salesmen when he entered the side door. But Mr. McCann was in the office, at his desk.

"Humph! Harris, I haven't seen you about to-day. Ah! I forgot. Lowther

said you had got through."

"At his request—yes, sir," Wib replied. "And as I must get another position at once, I have come to ask you for a written line to help me."

"Well—I don't know," grunted Mc-Cann. "I am not pleased with you, Harris. And yet Lowther admits this is a private matter between him and

you. You did something-"

"I went about the only way I knew of proving to you and Mr. Lowther that I made no mistake in Mr. Ware's order. I had a perfect right to do so—you will admit that."

"Thunder! you do stick to that idea," McCann said, with something like admiration. "You really believe it?"

"Certainly, sir."

"And you think it was worth while

losing your job for it?"

"It is beyond my means to pay you one hundred and eighty-five dollars and lose my commission of seventy-two dollars and fifty cents into the bargain, Mr. McCann. I know you are a just man. If I can prove to you that it was Mr. Ware's mistake, I know that you will do what is right by me."

"But I can't take you back herenot against Mr. Lowther's expressed wish, young man," said the senior part-

ner quickly.

"That I do not expect. But you will surely help me to get employment else-

where?"

"Why, I believe you to be honest—if mistaken. And you are of good caracter, and showed, I suppose, some ability in the business. Yes, I can write you a recommendation," returned McCann grudgingly.

"But, by the way, Harris, we shall expect you to settle up with us on that bill. I can't let the bookkeeper pay you any of your salary. You still owe a hundred and fifty dollars, or more."

"You hold me to that, do you, even when I have been discharged for no fault in my work?" demanded Wib bitterly.

"Well—that's a question. Lowther's a fool, but he's got a right to suspend a man if he wants him suspended."

"Then let him pay my bill," declared Wib tartly. "That looks like justice to me—not this."

"Look here, young man, you do not use policy," said McCann. "Remember, I'm about to write you a recommendation."

He smiled grimly, but Wib held his tongue after that. And really, the senior partner wrote a better letter than Wib had any reason to expect.

He stated clearly that the resigning salesman had given satisfaction, was honest, respectable, and was leaving for a reason entirely outside the exigencies of business

With this in his pocket, but feeling too stricken to say good-by to any of his fellow clerks, Wib Harris left the premises. It was not until he was on the walk that he remembered again that he was almost penniless and had really no shelter for the night—a situation which was absolutely new in his experience.

#### CHAPTER XI.

#### THE HANGING SWORD DROPS.

ODDLY enough, Wib found, in the very face of the shelterless night and the hunger which threatened him, a point which really bred satisfaction. If the sheriff came after him, now that he had left both Mrs. Kempt's and McCann & Lowther's, that official would have some difficulty in finding him.

Both his appetite and his wofully meager pocket drove him to the lunchroom where Bella presided at her share of the horseshoe counter. She welcomed

him with

"Well, they ain't got ye yet, have they? Why don't ye leave town altogether?"

"I don't know as I would be any better off. I'll risk it a while longer," trying to speak carelessly.

"Chee! wish you could see that joint up to Brandon. You wouldn't

wanter run the risk of boarding there an hour—I tell ye! I'd—I'd like ter git Jimmy out of it. Have a good mind to sneak him in some tools, like they does in them story-books. Bet I could fool the officers up there. They're a lot of stiffs."

"You'd better not try it; there's a law against helping a prisoner es-

cape."

"Chee! there's a law against 'most everything, ain't there? I don't see what chancet us poor folks has," she remarked, with an assumption that Wib was one with her that had by this time failed to amuse him.

He felt himself to be quite on a par with this sister to a boy who had gone to jail for attempted burglary. He was not the same Wib Harris whose thoughts had once centered upon breaking into

Fallowsea society.

He knew nothing about getting a cheap lodging, and he could not bring himself even to ask Bella's advice on that matter. So he went out and wandered about the poorer streets until he came to a lodging-house, the flaring electric sign of which advertised "Beds for 25c."

He went in and accosted the clerk; but when he saw that he would have to sleep in one of six small beds in a room he paid fifty cents instead and obtained a little closet to himself, with a lock on the door.

That, and ten cents for his breakfast, quite cleaned him out financially, and he went again to the furniture place where he had received the most encouragement the day before, with a desperate feeling that he had got to make the

man give him a trial.

Perhaps that feeling was what he needed to bring success. The man heard him through again, and was evidently well impressed by Mr. McCann's letter. They finally got down to terms, and as this employer did not know just how short a time Wib had been "on the floor" at his old place, he offered the young salesman a larger salary than he had been getting, although the commissions were not so liberal as at McCann & Lowther's.

However, this was a more popularpriced house, and the custom was heavier. Before noon Wib had had a chance to sell to four different people, and landed two of them for good bills. He felt vastly encouraged, and his new employer seemed well satisfied with him.

There was no money for lunch, and Wib was too wise to strike the firm for an advance the very first day. What he should do when night came he did not know; and he remembered with a pang that his bag, at the hotel, was quite out of his reach, for the reason that he would be expected to pay ten cents when he went to get it.

"However, I sha'n't want the bag if I am going to sleep out to-night," he reflected as he left the store for his

"luncheon" hour.

He proposed to walk the streets for a sufficient time and then go back to work with the air, if possible, of one who has dined well.

But as it happened, he ran squarely into a man named Hanlon, who was one of the older salesmen with McCann & Lowther. Wib had not been unpopular with his mates, and this man stopped and greeted him warmly.

"Hello! I'm glad to see you. We think it's a shame of Lowther to chase you as he did. And the bookkeeper says they kept your pay, too. How's that?"

"Yes. They say I must square up for

that table."

"A shame all the way through. In the middle of the week, too—how you fixed?"

Wib's face flamed up before he could control himself. Hanlon must have seen the misery in the boy's eyes.

"I thought so," he said, slipping a crumpled note into Wib's hand. "I

hear you've got a job?"

"Yes, I have; at better money than they paid me at McCann & Lowther's."

"All right. You know where I lunch. You can fix it with me next week when you get paid where you are. Good luck to you!"

Hanlon passed swiftly on before Wib could breathe his thanks. He stepped into a deserted doorway and examined

the bill. It was a V.

The fact that somebody had shown sympathy for him—and confidence in his ability to get along all right—all but overpowered him. He had never cared

particularly for Hanlon; certainly, the man had proved a friend in need.

He ran and bought some luncheon and then hurried back to his new place. Everything had suddenly taken on a brighter look; he was almost happy under the tonic of Hanlon's kindness.

Immediately after being released from work, that evening, he went to the hotel, secured his bag, and set about looking for a decent room near his new place of business. He could not afford to pay for room and board in advance, resolving, instead, to secure a lodging and "eat out" for a while. He thought he could economize in that way.

It was late in the evening before he found what he wanted and paid half his remaining capital for the room. But it was comfortable, and after he had eaten something he was glad to turn in, having passed so uncomfortable a

night at the cheap hotel.

The sun was shining the next day. It may have shone for a week previous, but Wib Harris had not seen it. The point that he had added to his debts in accepting the loan from Hanlon did not so much impress him. The fact that for the time being he was at ease in his mind was sufficient to make the whole world take on a gayer tinge.

He did well in his new position during the next few days, too, and found that his efforts were appreciated by his employer. There was a great deal for him to learn about the stock, it is true; but he made no mistakes, and his attentiveness to customers won him much com-

mendation.

During these days, whenever he went out of the store, he haunted the general delivery department of the post-office, which was only a block or so away. It was thus that he had written Adrian Lowther to reply to his letters; but no answer came. Finally the postmaster of Colfax in Ohio wrote to say that no person named Lowther resided in that town.

This was only a small disappointment, for Wib had not dared suppose Adrian would be so near as Ohio: The next day he received from Colfax, Indiana, his letter addressed to Adrian, with "Not Found" stamped across its face. The postmaster there was not accommodating enough to write.

And so in a week he had heard likewise from Colfax in Michigan, Minnesota, and Illinois. This narrowed the search down to three remaining Western towns; but Wib did not lose hope. He was betting on the one in California, anyway.

Meanwhile, he had heard nothing from Crosscup & Fysher. The three days of grace had passed and gone, and "no news was good news" in this

case.

The weekly pay-day at his new place would have left Wib quite flush had it not been for the five dollars he owed to Hanlon and the fact that he was obliged to purchase several articles of apparel, duplicates of which were in the trunk held by Mrs. Kempt. He could not pay Hanlon and Mrs. Kempt likewise and have sufficient to pay in advance for his second week's lodging and for his food.

But he went into the restaurant which Hanlon patronized and returned the loan.

"Still doing well, eh?" asked Hanlon. Then, with a wink, he added: "I'm not asking where you're working, you see. Better not tell me. You've left your old boarding-place, too, haven't you?"

" Yes.

"So I thought. There's been a feller looking for you—wants to see you bad, I reckon. But none of us knew your whereabouts, of course."

"What-what kind of a man?"

gasped Wib.

"Oh, well, one of those fellows shyster lawyers send out dunning—or maybe he was a process-server. Anyway, he was half-shot, and McCann got him out the side door in a hurry. He hung around the place for half a day. You want to fight shy of him, old man," and Hanlon laughed again.

But it was no laughing matter for Wib. He went off in low spirits again, and scarcely could walk through the streets without looking back over his shoulder to see if he was being followed by anybody who looked like the process-server who had formerly shamed him so

at McCann & Lowther's.

The sun was blotted out again for him. The next few days he slunk to

and from his work, traveling by unfrequented streets when possible, and he went 'way down to the lunch-room where Bella worked for most of his meals, believing that he was less likely to be observed there.

Besides, his funds were very low, and the prices prevailing in that eating-place were more within his means. Bella, too, was sympathetic, and Wib was hungry for sympathy. She looked upon the law as the enemy of all poor people, anyway; and as Wib was in fear of the law, she encouraged him.

"Only you'd better jump the town," she advised. "If you ain't got the spondulicks I'll letcher have some meself. Sometimes I gits two dollars tips here in a week, b'sides me wages."

"Thank you, Bella, but I couldn't borrow money of a lady," Wib told her, with perfect gravity—and something that was hard to swallow in his throat.

"Huh! you're all right," she declared. "I'm onter these fresh guys what come in here an' try to string me. You're a gent—anybody could see that with half an eye."

He had grown mightily interested in the girl, despite her slang and lack of bringing up. She knew very well how to take care of herself, and, as she expressed it, "could give as good as was sent" with the "fresh guys" who patronized the place.

One evening Wib saw her knock a flashy-looking young fellow fairly off his stool with the flat of her hand for something he had said to her in a low tone. Down came the boss—a puffy, redfaced Dutchman—to quell the row; but when he heard what the fellow had said he propelled him swiftly toward the door and warned him not to return.

"I von't haf no plackguards in dis place," he declared. "You're all right, Pella," and so waddled back to his station at the cashier's window.

Wib had noticed the fellow who created the disturbance on several occasions. The man had looked at him hard, he remembered, and Wib was impressed with the idea that he had seen him somewhere before.

He believed himself so well hidden down in this part of the city from all his old friends and acquaintances, however, that he gave little thought to the seeming familiarity of this fellow's looks. Besides, the man did not come to the eating-place again.

About this time he heard, from the town of Colfax in Jasper County, Iowa. The postmaster informed him that although there was a family by the name of Lowther in his district, they knew no Adrian Lowther, and that they had no relatives living East. That narrowed the quest down to two towns.

At the end of his second week with his new employers Wib was much perturbed to know what was best to do. Should he reclaim his trunk from Mrs. Kempt, or should he change his lodgings again to a house where he could obtain board as well as room?

He had found that "eating out" was not an economy after all; and then he did not like to go into good restaurants, for fear he should meet somebody who knew him. He had not money enough to follow out both of these plans, so finally he searched for a new boardingplace.

He found it the night before his roomrent came due again, paid a small deposit, and the next morning packed his hand-satchel and carried it with him to work. He planned to take it to the new boarding-place at noon, although he did not eat luncheon there.

His luncheon hour was from eleven to twelve, or quarter-past. The way to the boarding-house led him near the eating-place—which he so frequently patronized, and he stepped in for a cup of coffee and a sandwich.

As he entered he saw two men standing near the door, and one he recognized as the fellow whom the proprietor had put out of the house, one evening, for insulting the waitress. Wib did not notice the second man at all.

The room was crowded, and Wib had to wait for a stool in Bella's section. Once he glanced through the front window—a huge plate of glass—and saw the two men outside with their faces pressed close to the pane.

pressed close to the pane.
"Whacher want?" asked Bella, when
Wib finally slid into a seat. "How's

things comin'?"

"Oh, all right, I guess," responded Wib, giving his modest order.

"Glad ter hear it," she responded.
"Draw one!" to the man at the coffee machine. "Ham, 'r tongue, d' jer say?"

"Ham," said Wib, and then was startled by the expression which he saw suddenly come over the waitress's face.

She was staring at something, or somebody, behind him. He turned slow-ly on his stool to find a man—a total stranger to him—standing near him.

The man stared at him and said nothing; Wib thought, for an instant, that he must be waiting his turn for a stool. He looked back at Bella.

He looked back at Bella.

The girl's face was working strangely, and she held the plate on which reposed Wib's ham sandwich transfixed in the air.

"Hullo! what's the matter, Bella?" he asked, reaching to take the plate. "Let's have my coffee."

Just then the man at his elbow spoke. "Guess your name's Wilbur Harris, ain't it?" he asked in a confident tone.

The words affected Wib like an electric shock. He wheeled on his stool again, his face paling, and stared horrifiedly at the speaker.

He knew what it meant. The sword which had been hanging over him these weeks had finally fallen. This man represented Lomark's lawyers, and he

had come after him.

"You're Wilbur Harris, who worked for McCann & Lowther?" said the man. "I've had a hunt for you, but I got you in time, all right. There ain't many gits away from me. You'd left your old boarding-house on Gallup Street, so the woman told me there, and nobody could tell me where you'd struck your new job. But you're 'it' now, all right," and he rested an authoritative hand upon Wib's shoulder.

The near-by patrons of the place had stopped eating to listen and stare. Wib could not speak at first, although he

moistened his lips and tried to.

"That's all right, Mr. Harris. Finish your grub and then we'll go along, if you don't mind," said the man.

Wib turned blindly to the counter, and to the sandwich which Bella had set down. She looked at him commiseratingly, and Wib saw that the tears were gathering in her bold black eyes.

"I'd like ter swipe him one," she whispered fiercely. "I told yer ye'd oughter made a sneak."

The stranger heard her and laughed. "I guess he was going to do that, miss, but I got him just in time. He's got his baggage with him," and he picked up Wib's satchel with an air of possession.

Meanwhile, Wib stared at the sandwich. Bella brought the coffee, and he mechanically drank it down, although

it was scalding hot.

### CHAPTER XII.

THE CELL.

"I—I GUESS I can't eat that sandwich, Bella," Wib said at last, and his voice sounded weak and far away to his own ears.

He was aware of trying to smile and look careless; but it was a miserable, pitiful attempt, and the chuckles of the men about him filled his ears with a roaring like that of the surf on a seabeach.

Bella whipped the sandwich off the plate, grabbed a couple of others to put with it, wrapped them all neatly in oiled paper, and thrust them into Wib's hands as he slid down from the stool.

"Put 'em in your bag," she said.

"You'll want 'em out there."

"I reckon that's good advice, miss," remarked the authoritative stranger, with a smirk. "Here's your bag, sir. Put 'em in. Brace up—there's worse comin'."

He laughed, and the laugh got through the maze in which Wib had been flung by the shock of his arrest. He shot the fellow a look which made him step back suddenly, as though he expected a blow.

"You do your duty; you're not paid

to be funny, are you?"

"Oh, hell!" growled the man, taking his arm as Wib snapped the bag shut again. "If you're going to cut up rusty——"

"Take your hand off me. I'll go with you quietly enough. You are a sheriff.

I suppose?"

"Deputy. Here's the warrant. Only one more day to run. You was a foxy

chap, all right; another hour and you'd been out of town, eh? Out of the State, mebbe. Well, that's what the warrant's for."

He backed Wib into a corner, drew out a folded paper, stamped officially, and read in a low voice the warrant issued by the court for "Wilbur Harris, defendant in above-named proceedings, who is about to remove from the jurisdiction of this court, and from the State, to the sworn knowledge of plaintiff."

"That's a lie," said Wib hotly. "I

wasn't going to leave."

"And with this bag—ho, ho!" laughed the deputy sheriff. "Well, come on."

"Where?"

"To the office of plaintiff's attorney, first. You can settle it with them if you want to, you know. This ain't no criminal case."

They went outside. The young fellow whom Wib had before noticed was

there, grinning broadly.

"All right, Moxey," said the officer.
"I got him. You can run back to the shop and tell old Lomark—and there's a drink on me whenever you come 'round. This way, Mr. Harris."

They took a car across town, Wib sitting humped over on the seat, with the bag on his knees, staring straight be-

fore him.

Dumbly he felt thankful that deputy sheriffs did not wear uniforms. It would have been much more awful had this been a police officer by his side. But the air of the man was coarse and repulsive.

He had been drinking, too, and his vicinity exuded had whisky and worse tobacco. Wib feared that people would guess the deputy's business and suspect

why they were together.

Of what was held in store for him in the future he did not think much at the time. He bitterly reflected upon the illusage that had already fallen to his lot.

Lomark and his lawyers had perjured themselves by saying that Wib was about to leave the State. And the very chance in which the deputy had made the arrest seemed to prove the claim of the plaintiff true.

It was true that Wib had hidden from

interference by emissaries of the lawyer. He saw now how unwise that had been. In shrinking from this very calamity that had overtaken him he had alienated any sympathy that his case might have evoked in a judicial mind.

Evidently, he was not to be taken to court. He was to be spared a public exhibition of his misfortune. Why he was to be taken to the lawyer's office instead of to jail at once he could not

imagine.

He could not satisfy the claim against him. And he doubted if Lomark so much wanted his money as he desired to heap shame and ignominy upon Wib's devoted head.

These shreds of disconnected thought—and not one plan for his own assistance—surged through his head as he rode to the office of Crosscup & Fysher.

In a daze still, Wib walked up the stairway with the deputy. The latter seemed to be easy in his mind regarding any attempt on his prisoner's part to escape. He left Wib in the anteroom, where several people sat, and where only one clerk held sway, and went in to see Mr. Fysher, who had charge of Lomark's case.

Wib sat near the door, the bag by his side. He could have snatched it up, slipped out of the door, and been well away from the place before the deputy could have seized him. He had money enough in his pocket to pay his fare out of the State, too. Once over the line, as his case was a civil matter, he could not be brought back.

"But I won't do that," he told himself. "I have not intentionally done anything against the law yet. Besides, as rough and unpleasant as this officer is, he has treated me decently. He has tacitly accepted my parole. I won't make trouble for him by escaping."

By and by he was beckoned from the inner office by the deputy and went in. He found Fysher to be a wizened little man, of an indeterminable age, who looked at him and snapped him up at every word, as though he was on the lookout to catch him in a misstatement. He rasped Wib from the start.

"Well, sir, I suppose you are ready now to settle this matter?" was his first

question.

"I would be glad to settle it, if possible; I told Mr. Lomark that," Wib said mildly. "But until I can get

money enough-"

"Oh, yes; we've heard all that before. What we want now, Mr. Harris, is money, not promises. Nothing less than a settlement in full of the judgment for eighty-eight dollars and sixty-seven cents, plus the costs of this execution and warrant, will satisfy our client now. What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't see what I can do," Wib said

brokenly.

"Young man, do you realize that this officer is going to take you to the county jail? Eh—do you realize it?"

"I realize," said Wib, finally goaded to desperation, "that you have obtained a warrant by dishonest means. When you swore that it was your belief that I was about to leave the State you swore to a lie."

"What, sir! How dare you speak to me in that way? Do you realize that I am an attorney?"

"Yes, I realize that very clearly," re-

turned Wib bitterly.

"And you could hardly convince the court that you were not going away, when the sheriff caught you with the bag in your hand," and he pointed, grinning, at Wib's satchel. "You're quite prepared for a stay in Sheriff Hilary's boarding-house out there at Brandon, I hope? When you come to your senses you can communicate with us," said Fysher, with a nasty smile.

"You mean to shut me up in jail, do you?" demanded Wib, his face very pale, his breath drawn thickly, as he gazed down upon the wizened little man.

"We do, sir."

"You are going to let your client pay my board there, and so add to a bill that I swear I cannot pay now?"

"We shall let the law take its course, Mr. Harris," Fysher said, shrugging his shoulders and turning away to his desk, as though he had finished with the case.

"'Let the law take its course!' Aye, that's a fine phrase. It means that you have got both your client and me in a hole, and now you wash your hands of the matter! You are going to shut me up where, no matter how good my in-

tentions may be, I cannot work to earn money to pay my creditor, who meanwhile is adding to my debt by the payment of three dollars weekly. That may be law, sir, but by Heaven! it isn't common sense."

"Tut! tut! take him away, Mogle. I'm busy," said Fysher, in an aside to the deputy sheriff. "He'll come to his senses by and by and be glad to get out

of that place."

"You scoundrel, you!" roared Wib suddenly, losing control entirely of his temper. "I'll remain there till I rot before you'll hear a word from me! Lomark can pay my board till doomsday. You've done your worst to me already. Nothing can matter now. I hope I may die before either you or Lomark gets a cent from me."

Mogle laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

"Come away, Mr. Harris. No use in working yourself up in this way, you know," and he said it rather kindly.

"Take me out of here," said Wib hotly, "before I wring that scoundrel's neck! Come on!" and he seized his

bag and started for the door.

They went out without Fysher's evincing any further interest, and Mogle had fairly to trot to keep up with Wib in his haste to descend the stairs and leave the building.

"Hold on!" the deputy panted. seizing the young man's arm again. "We ain't doin' a six-day race. There's plenty of time. Don't be in such haste to get to Brandon—you'll be long enough there if you stick to what you

said to the lawyer."

Mogle seemed really to feel for his prisoner; but the means he took to show his friendship were wearisome to Wib. He seemed to think that the young man ought to thank him for delaying their trip to the jail. And most of their delays were occasioned by Mogle's wanting "to see a man" in a saloon.

He left Wib on the sidewalk, usually, and had the young fellow so desired he could easily have eluded the deputy and escaped in a dozen different ways. But a sullen determination had taken possession of Wib. He would see this thing through, in spite of everything.

Indeed, he finally had to drag Mogle off to the train, and by the time they landed at the Brandon station the deputy could scarcely walk straight. Spectators might have thought Wib the officer and Mogle the prisoner, who had not yet recovered from the debauch which had brought about his arrest.

But the railroad station was little patronized by other than those who came on official business or because the courts sent them there. Out of the same train by which Wib traveled came six prisoners, handcuffed to each other and to an officer. Wib shuddered to think that he might have been treated much worse than he was.

The penitentiary and county jail was enclosed in a huge yard surrounded by a twenty-foot wall of granite on three sides; but the massive front of the main building was not enclosed. The bars at the high windows, the massive, bolt-studded doors, and the general air of desolation about the place as they approached filled Wib with dismay.

He saw the chained prisoners admitted by a door at the level of the ground and near the center of the building; but Mogle had sense enough to show him an outside stair-flight, which they ascended to the second floor. There they were admitted to the warden's office.

This door was not locked. Afterward, Wib had occasion to remember that, and saw its significance. Every other door and gate which gave entrance to the place was heavily barred and closely guarded; but the entrance to the warden's office was for visitors, and that was unlocked during office hours.

Warden Hilary, who was likewise sheriff of the county, was not in evidence. A young man—one of the deputy wardens—was sitting at a desk in the corner, and beckoned the half-intoxicated Mogle and his prisoner over. "What's this, Mogle?" he demanded

"What's this, Mogle?" he demanded sharply. "Who's this gentleman?"

Mogle pulled out his papers with gravity. "Brought yer a new boarder, Mr. Comack," he said. "Nice feller—hic! Hope you'll treat him well—f'r my sake."

"I'll have you committed if you come out here again in this condition, Mogle," declared the official.

But the deputy sheriff fell fast asleep in his chair and paid no attention to the threat

Comack wrote some memoranda in a big ledger; then he looked at Wib.

"Is your lawyer coming, sir?" he

Wib could only shake his head. If he spoke, it seemed to him, he must burst into tears.

"Haven't you arranged for bail?"

"No, sir," murmured the poor fellow.
"Why—why, that's too bad. I hate
to send you down-stairs. If there is
any hope of your friends coming out tonight you can remain up here till closing
time."

"I have no friends," returned Wib, and the bitterness which got into his voice steadied it—and him. "I do not ask any favors, sir, although I thank you. I expect to be treated just as the other debtors are treated."

"Oh, well," said the deputy warden, "you haven't got to stay but a week. This is a civil case, you know. By paying a lawyer fifteen dollars, or so, you can take the oath and be released at the end of seven days. Right this way, please."

He unbarred a gate which gave admittance to an encaged stairway which descended through the center of the office floor into the room below. As Wib went down he saw the six prisoners, now without their chains, being ushered through a door into the interior of the jail.

This reception-room was a huge place, its windows heavily barred on both the inside and outside, and giving a view of the corridor through a strong screen which constituted its rear wall.

Along this screen were set benches, and in the corridor there were likewise benches for the use of the prisoners who were called to the office to receive visitors. Wib noticed several visitors, both men and women, whispering through the screen to their friends in durance.

In the office itself sat a lean, sharp-featured man—the prototype of Fysher—talking to a fellow in a striped suit, plainly a lawyer discussing matters with his client.

This prisoner was the first clear glimpse Wib had gained of the uniform

of the inmates of the place. The broad stripes of black and gray were positively the ugliest things he had ever set eyes

And a sudden horror shook him—a thought that had not entered his troubled brain before. Would they dress

him in similar garments?

He felt, for the first time, how utterly helpless he was. He had no rights now that were bound to be respected. He must do what he was told, must accept whatever treatment was meted out to him, must abide by the commands of the men whom the law placed over him.

Was it a crime he had committed? He was locked up like a criminal. The iron seared his soul at last. He came down the remaining few steps into the main office, shaking, and all but ready to faint.

Afterward he silently thanked Comack from his soul that he paid no attention to him. The deputy warden called an officer from a desk, pointed to Wib, and said something in a low tone. The officer motioned the young man to a seat, saying pleasantly:

"Just wait a moment, will you? I'll

attend to you shortly."

But Wib knew that the arrangement was to give him time to gain control of himself again. His eyes followed Comack's retreating form with dumb gratitude as the deputy warden went upstairs.

Wib sat still, his bag on the floor between his feet. Another file of prisoners entered and were rapidly docketed by the officer at the desk. A receipt was handed to the deputy who brought them, a gong in the corridor called a prison officer to receive them, and so they were "taken back."

One of them was several years younger than Wib himself—a dirty, miserable-looking little chap; and he

was crying.

Finally, in his interest in what was going on about him, Wib regained his composure. When the officer beckoned him to the desk he went more sturdily, and answered the questions put to him in an unshaken voice.

His pedigree was taken as carefully as though he had been committed for

an actual crime. But the officer was

very decent to him.

"You'll have no trouble here, Mr. Harris, as long as you obey the rules. Naturally, we cannot treat the debtors much different from the other men', it would be bad for the discipline," he said kindly.

"I'll chum you with a good fellow—the best of the bunch. By the way, you haven't a razor, or a pistol, or anything

like that, in your bag?"

He smiled, and Wib smiled in return. Half an hour before, he could not have believed that such a thing could happen.

"No, I have nothing of the kind," he

assured the officer.

"Do you smoke?"

"I have a few cigars," admitted Wib.

"Sorry. You'll have to give me your word that you will keep them in your satchel while you remain here. It is against the rules for the prisoners to smoke. They can chew all they wish; but no smoking."

"Very well, sir."

"All right." He rang the gong in the corridor again. A young fellow in the striped uniform of the prisoners appeared at the screen. The officer took Wib to the gate and unlocked it.

"Cell ten, lower tier, west corridor, jail side," said the officer briefly, and locked the gate behind Wib, leaving him

to the guidance of the trusty.

The trusty led him silently along the reechoing main corridor, through the gateway of a barrier of heavy iron bars that was closed at night, into the jail wing of the building. Down a long passage they went, with high barred windows on the right hand and three tiers of empty cells on the left.

The second and third tiers had iron galleries before them, with spiral stairways at either end. The cells which he looked into as he passed had the appear-

ance to Wib's mind of tombs.

The walls were of enameled brick, speckless, and with a cone-shaped hole in the rear wall, narrowing to merely a peep-hole, through which a guard could peer from the passage behind and see all that went on in the cell.

The trusty stopped at cell 10.

"You and Billy Grist have this between you," he whispered. "But you don't have to stay here unless you want to. The debtors have a place outdoors in the daytime. Want me to show you?"

"I'd rather not," murmured Wib.

"I'd much rather be alone."

"I'll have to lock you in if you stay in your cell," said the trusty.

"Do so, then."

Wib went inside and sat down on one of the two wooden stools, with his back to the man. He heard the barred door clang to and lock, and he shivered; but he did not look around.

(To be continued.)

## THE MAN ON THE BENCH.

BY BURKE JENKINS.

Before and after the hobo woke up, told by himself, and no pipe-dream at that.

HATE work.

Do I hear a second? Or am I the only man who escaped the glint of the lantern of old Diogenes?

So I sit on a bench in the Park and ruminate. Among other things I ponder on the derivation of the word "hobo."

This, I take it—and I ought to know, for I'm one myself—is all that is left of two Latin words, homo and bonus. Merely the first syllables have been retained, mutually joined, and the word, though suffering hardships, still retains the old significance, "a good fellow."

And I've met many a good fellow in these circles of ennui unfeigned.

Furthermore, you will see when I get fairly unlimbered into my story, that the man who did me the shabby hailed from a so-called higher realm. Still, I'm beginning to forgive him, for he certainly added to my collection of stirring reminiscences, and these form my

On one of those bright, shiny days in early May, I lay back in easy posture passively perusing a pink paper of yesterday's issue. The translucent greasespots of the picnicker's lunch that had been shut from prying eyes by this last edition offered a little trouble in my deciphering, but for the most part I was tranquil, feeling kind of "general" with the world, as the feller says.

As I was yawning my approval of some of the editorial sentiments therein expressed and laid bare to public gaze and censure, I happened to raise eyes to a heavily bundle-encumbered individual wearing a velvet jacket and tam-o'-shanter.

"Artist" was stamped all over the outfit. In fact, the verdict was so unmistakable to even the hastiest survey that even I began to get suspicious, and I assure you I'm most gullible, as the following may serve to verify.

He stopped on the pebble-and-tar walk, gazed about in admiration at the prospect, and then began to pitch camp not five yards from my whereabouts.

Of course I laid down my literature in view of this nearer and more absorbing interest, and watched operations.

He knew the trade all right, and the loving way in which he whirled pigment showed me that that man wasn't working; he was just playing. And I began surely to envy him some. For even with me time hangs mighty heavy at times. I begin to think that I myself had better get a hobby to groom. But that's whatsoever, as the feller says.

Along came a cop and spied the outfit. Out flicks the velvet-jacket's permit from the Arsenal; grins are exchanged, copper takes a squint at the growing slather of colors and retires, leaving an imperturbed artist.

And then I began to nibble the bait.

I revivified muscle, sent just the required volition into operation, and eased my way over to a commanding position behind the fellow's shoulder.

He snatched a hasty glance at me sidewise and, with nothing of the sar-castic showing, he piped:

"How do you like it?"

"Well," I answered as truthful as I could, "between men, I don't seem to be dead in line with your view-point of

this here tree, for instance."

"Cobbler stick to your last," he put in; though the why I couldn't just make out. Anyway, the remark made us both look at my shoes, which were shore some tattered.

Then he downs brush from his teeth, where he'd been tucking it occasionally, and he looks me up and down.

"Pretty husky chap, ain't you?" he

said

Well, I'm not a weakling and that's a fact; so I squared shoulders, tucked out my chest, and admitted the accusation.

"Want to connect with a little coin?" he asked, and then noticing my reluctance and general tone of shyness, he added, "Without a bit of work?"

"What's the lay?" I said, thus as-

sured.

"Exactly it," he replied. "It is a 'lay.' I need a model for my 'Dead Gladiator,' and all you'll have to do is lie there while I put you to canvas. Sleep, if you want to. How does it strike you?"

"Does seem mighty much in my line," I admitted. "What's there in it?"

"Dollar an hour, if your muscular outfit proves as good as it seems from the outside."

"Better," I said without conceit.

So it was arranged.

He slashed a finishing touch or two to that hasty daub, seeming to lose interest in it from the moment.

I helped him collect some fixings and away we piked, a sure queer pair, off to his sky-lighted studio, 'way over on the East Side.

A sober-faced chap let us in, after a near-sighted squint of close recognition; bolted the door behind us, and I was shown the dressing-room, where my friend, the artist, tossed me a leopard skin for raiment, and said, by way of suggestion merely, that the hot water was to the left.

I pinked myself into pretty good shape, slung that leopard skin on with all the grace of ancient Rome and stepped into view.

"Good enough," commented the artist, who'd been arranging the lights.

He propped an easel to hand and then indicated a low sort of a table covered with a brown cloth.

"You just lie down on that," he said in his easy way, "and I'll pose you, and

fit you out in all the regalia."

I planked myself down and let him place me.

He stretched my arms far out; then, in a second, I felt iron click itself around each of my wrists.

At the snap of the shackles his entire

attitude changed.

"Pretty realistic posing, isn't it?" he drawled.

It was so unexpected I was paralyzed for a moment. Then the trick was bare to me, and I squirmed in a mounting fury. Temper for a moment predominated.

"I guess we're about ready for you now, doctor," continued the fellow, addressing the somber-faced man who had let us in and who now appeared in a white-duck suit, and carrying a tray of as sickening an array of infernal glistening instruments as I ever laid eye to.

But he echoed nothing of the other's sarcasm. His manner was absolutely businesslike, and I lost sight entirely of the other from that moment, so fascinated was I with his movements.

So studied and systematic were his preparations that a sickening scare laid hold of me. I couldn't even squirm. I felt my face frozen into lines of abject terror.

Still he didn't hurry with his fiendish work. He even tested the edge of a blade on his thumb-nail; apparently found a nick in it, and repaired the flaw on a small oil-stone in his kit.

Assured of his instruments finally, he approached me with an easy tread.

Down and out I went on the second, from fright alone or drug I don't know.

And I woke up. Where? On that self-same bench in the Park.

It was just growing day.

At first I thought I had dreamed it all. Then I examined the grass in the vicinity. Heel-marks showed plainly enough. I had been carried back to that bench. Wheel-tracks showed where a carriage had stopped opposite.

Then I thumped myself over for damages sustained. I came upon a pro-

tuberance near my vest-pocket. A pinch of it produced no pain, so I finally fingered into the pocket and produced a roll of twenty dollars in five-dollar bills.

"Shade of Dives!" I vells.

Then I comes across a slip of paper among the money, and on it were these words:

A closed mouth spills no mush.

Then I spent six months forgetting the affair, when one day as I was shambling down Fifth Avenue I met another shock.

It was located in a window, just one big picture.

Oh, yes, I recognized it.

It was only a head and under it was a card which had on it:

> . "TERROR." First Prize of A.A.S.

# THE EIGHTH WONDER.

BY WILLIAM WALLACE COOK,

Author of "A Round Trip to the Year 2000," "Adrift in the Unknown," "Marsoned in 1492," and "A Gift from Mars."

An attempt to displace the key-stone of modern progress for private profit.

## SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Peck, who tells the story, falls in with Copernicus Jones near a butte in the Bad Lands when they are both broke. Jones asks Peck for the loan of a cartridge in order that he may put an end to himself, explaining that he is an inventor, but that the trusts have beaten him out at all his games. A Mexican has just stolen his horse, leaving behind only a coat, which has dropped to Jones's shot sent after the miscreant. Mechanically searching through the pockets of this jacket, Peck finds a lottery-ticket which proves eventually to be the winner of a prize of fifty thousand dollars.

The two annex the money, and with it put through a great scheme of Jones's—nothing less than an arrangement of magnets designed to corner all the electricity in the country, with the idea of pedling it out at the price set by Copernicus.

country, with the idea of pedling it out at the price set by Copernicus.

Their first experiment brings them the acquaintance, in a rather outlandish fashion, of the somewhat shrewish Elizabeth Carr, her pretty niece, Nora, and the latter's father, Professor Carr, but fails to accomplish the far-reaching wonders predicted by Jones. The first hint of the really colossal thing their monkeying with nature is to bring about comes to Peck the following day.

The vast power of the electromagnets has so deflected the polar axes of the earth that their relation to the sun is changing and a new equatorial line with a new arrangement of zones established, the general effect being one of shifting from the north to the south. The

phenomena causes a small national panic.

Professor Carr comes to Jones to insist on his turning off the electricity. Instead a new company is formed, called the Jones & Peck Solar Supply Company, with Carr as a silent partner, which is to maintain a stationary mild climate throughout the United States, this is to be done by waiting till the days reach a certain length and then reducing the electric power till it no more than reacts against the polar forces. On the 15th of October the power is reduced. There is a violent earthquake and a frightful storm. Jones turns to his partner and says triumphantly: "We win, my dear Peck."

### CHAPTER XI.

TWO COMMITTEES OF THREE.

'HE storm died out as abruptly as it had begun. Not until the last roll of thunder had muttered to silence among the buttes did I round up my scattered wits and go after Copernicus for information.

"We win?" I repeated. "What do you mean?"

"They may talk about the sun-spots

\* This story began in the November issue of The Argosy. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

as much as they please," answered Copernicus; "it is really the magnet that is doing the work."

"I'm glad to hear it," said I; "but what was that we just went through?"

"I caused a magnetic storm and an earthquake, but they were only small affairs. The jarring of the molasses, which was heaved upward across its center and left its mark on the white sides of the bowl, proves that the focal point of disturbance was directly beneath us."

"Tampering with the magnet's energy caused the storm and the earthquake, did it?"

" Undoubtedly."

"What has that to do with the magnet's effect on the sun?"

"Now I am surprised at you! Can't you see how it proves the professor's theory? The sun is affecting terrestrial magnetism through the medium of our magnet, thereby establishing a very intimate relation with this part of the earth's surface. The situation is beginning to clear, Ira. We know a good deal more than we did."

"You thought something out of the ordinary was going to happen, didn't

"I had a premonition to that effect. That is why I arranged the seismograph."

The next day Willetts brought news that our earthquake had sent its tremors as far north as Turtle Mountain and as far south as the Black Hills. This, the professor stated, had added to the general alarm.

We were likewise acquainted with the fact that six mysterious gentlemen, divided into two parties of three each, had arrived in Medora. The two parties were at outs with each other, it appeared, and were staying at separate hotels.

When the members of one party met the members of the other party on the street they passed in haughty silence and with averted faces.

While it was plain that these gentlemen were traveling "incog.," it was equally plain that they were men of mark. Their elaborate reticence regarding themselves and their mission together with one other fact brought directly to the professor's notice, aroused misgivings in our silent partner's mind and af-

forded the mysterious gentlemen a place in his report.

The other fact was this: Willetts had been approached by a member of each party, at different times, and asked to describe the procedure necessary in order to make a safe journey to Horseshoe Butte.

This could only mean, as the professor interpreted it, that the gentlemen were anticipating a visit to our headquarters; and whether with friendly or hostile intent remained yet to be developed. Be that as it might, Copernicus and I were told to be on our guard.

The 15th, destined to be a red-letter day in the history of the world, passed quietly for Copernicus and me—in decided contrast, I imagined, to the sensationalism which must have been rampant on every other spot of the earth's surface.

On the morning of the 16th my friend and I stood in the door of our shanty and watched the sun's flaring rim appear over the crests of the buttes. Was the great orb ahead of time, as it had been for the preceding fourteen or fifteen days, or had it answered to the schedule which Copernicus had prepared?

This was something we could not know, for chronometers could not be kept in the magnetic field.

"I am positive," averred Copernicus, "that there has been a change. It merely remains to be seen whether my figuring was correct and a sufficient number of cells disconnected."

After we had finished our breakfast, Copernicus went outside to take a look at the battery, and I busied myself writing up my journal. In the midst of my work my friend called me, and I hurried to join him.

"There," he observed, pointing northward, "are the six mysterious gentlemen mentioned in the professor's report."

They were riding toward us in groups of three; all portly men in broadcloth, and with high silk hats and moccasins. There were no saddles on their mounts, and no bridles; a folded blanket answered for the first, and the customary hackamore for the second.

They were equipped in regulation form for a trip through the radius of magnetic attraction, having profited, I suppose, by Willetts's suggestions. Unused to horseback exercise, rendered doubly fatiguing by the absence of a saddle, the entire six had assumed attitudes which told of weariness.

They came on in two straggling lines, the gentlemen at the head of each line evincing some show of spirit at sight of Copernicus and slapping their horses into a canter.

"Jones," cried the two gentlemen simultaneously—"Jones, of the Jones & Peck Solar Supply Company?" They dismounted as one man and extended their hands. "My card, sir."

"My name is Jones," replied Copernicus, reaching out on either side and

grasping the cards.

"I will make it to your advantage," said one, with a defiant look at the other, "to grant me an interview first."

"So will I," answered the other, returning the defiant look with interest.

The remaining four drew near, dismounted with wheezy groans, and braced up alongside of their respective spokesmen. All were red and perspiring; but I could see that all were men of quality and of much concern in the world. I came close and looked over Copernicus's shoulder.

"Mr. Plympton Hargreaves" was the legend on one of the cards, with the following notation in longhand: "Representing the Allied Anthracite Association."

"Mr. Dunmore Phipps" was the announcement on the second card, "Representing the Western Railway Interests."

"Gentlemen," said Copernicus, stiffening perceptibly, "to what am I indebted for the honor of a visit?"

"Will you listen to me first?" de-

manded Mr. Hargreaves.

"Or to me?" queried Mr. Phipps.

"I will listen to you both," said Copernicus. He turned to me. "My partner, Mr. Peck, gentlemen. Come up to the house, won't you? It is cooler there."

Copernicus led the way and the six gentlemen followed, each party preserving its frigid bearing toward the other and peering curiously around at the evidences of our activity.

I bunched the six horses together and tied them to the rigid chain of the safety-

box. The floating chest was duly explained to our visitors, and filled them with a vast amount of awe. They trod as though they were on enchanted ground—although this may have been the result of benumbed limbs and unfamiliar moccasins.

"Remember," I whispered to Copernicus, "if one of them is from the Bicycle Trust I am to have a chance at

him."

But there was no such man in either party. There were Mr. Sykes, representing the cattle interests; Mr. Prits, of the Great Lakes Steamship Combine; Mr. Doolittle, of the oil monopoly, and Mr. Kiefenheimer, of the Overcoat and Mitten Trust.

They segregated naturally into winter and anti-winter groups. The winter group included Mr. Hargreaves, Mr. Doolittle, and Mr. Kiefenheimer; while the summer solicitors were Mr. Phipps, Mr. Prits, and Mr. Sykes.

Inside the house the opposing seasons occupied benches on either side of the room. Between them sat Copernicus and

me.

"What time did the sun rise this morning, gentlemen?" inquired Copernicus.

"By gad," puffed Mr. Hargreaves, "you've won out. I wouldn't have believed it, but you have proved that you can do exactly what you say. The sun came up, this morning, on yesterday's time to a dot."

"But for that, sir," spoke up Mr. Phipps, "we should none of us be here now. You have proved, Mr. Jones, that you are a man to be reckoned with. We"—Mr. Phipps indicated himself and the remaining two on his bench—"are here to do the reckoning."

"So are we," said Mr. Hargreaves, indicating those on his side of the room.

"We want you," continued Mr. Phipps, "to give us seventy to eighty

degrees Fahrenheit right along."

"And we," spoke up the coal man, "are here to protest against this threatened spell of enervating weather. Sentiment is against this unnatural thing you are seeking to bring about—the sentiment of the country, sir, voicing itself through the anthracite, the petroleum, and the clothing interests."

"What," thundered the railway man, " are the interests of a clique of miners, refiners, and manufactuers as compared with the interests of the transportation companies, cattle men, and the whole nation?" This was flung across the room directly at the coal man.

"Bah!" said Mr. Hargreaves.

"Bah to you!" said the militant Mr.

Phipps.

Copernicus was taking great comfort out of this odd situation. I saw a stealthy twinkle creep into his eyes.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he exclaimed, "this is hardly genteel. I suppose you have come here to make Mr. Peck and me some kind of an offer?"

"What is your price," said Mr. Hargreaves, "to stop this meddling with mundane affairs and let the earth wag along as it used to?"

"How much will you take," cried Mr. Phipps, "to keep up the good work in-

definitely?"

"Our price to throw the thing either way," replied Copernicus, without so much as the flicker of an evelid, "is one billion dollars."

There was a slump on both sides of the room—a dull "thump"—as six astounded men fell backward against the walls."

"You-you want the earth," said Mr.

Hargreaves, slowly recovering.

"I've got it, sir," answered Copernicus. "The question is, what am I going to do with it? It remains for you gentlemen to say."

Mr. Phipps and Mr. Hargreaves ex-

changed looks.

"Not for me," said Mr. Phipps, get-

"Nor me," answered Hargreaves. "Mr. Mix!" he added, lifting his voice.

A red-faced man wearing a fierce mustache, a broad-brimmed hat, and a pair of yarn socks showed himself most unexpectedly in the doorway. Copernicus and I both leaped to our feet.

"There's your man," went on Hargreaves, pointing to Copernicus. "Serve

your warrant."

Mr. Mix stepped into the room, drawing a folded document from his pocket. But he was not very confident, for his hands shook as they opened the paper and his voice trembled as he remarked:

"I'm the sheriff from Medora. I had a badge when I left town, but it tore away from me a few miles back, so you'll have to take my word. This here warrant, Copernicus Jones, was sworn out by one Francisco Gonzales, and charges you with the theft of a lottery-ticket worth fifty thousand dollars. Give up peaceable, now. We're seven to two, and it won't help any to make trouble."

"There are more ways than one to

skin a cat," said Mr. Hargreaves.

"Now you're talking," said Mr. Phipps. "A billion dollars, eh? Well, we'll see."

That confounded lottery-ticket was a specter that wouldn't down.

## CHAPTER XII.

### MR. MIX IN A TANGLE.

THERE were times when the Old Nick dodged around in the far recesses of Copernicus Jones's nature and gave little fleeting glimpses of himself in Copernicus Iones's eves. The senior partner of our firm was decidedly cool.

"This was cut and dried, I suppose?" said Copernicus, turning a cold eye on

the six mysterious gentlemen.

"We had a card up our sleeve," laughed Mr. Phipps. "We should not have played it, however, if you had shown a reasonable spirit."

"I wonder that the lot of you were able to get together long enough to hatch

up such a scheme!"

"Merely a move for mutual protection,". said Mr. Phipps. "Hargreaves was back of this warrant. I'm back of another, sworn out by Solomon Levi. But I guess one warrant is sufficient."

"Suppose you do get me out of the way for a while," asked Copernicus, "how will it profit you gentlemen?"

"A few weeks in jail will bring you to time," chuckled Phipps, and the chuckle was taken up and passed along

by the other five.

So far as Mr. Mix was concerned, this was a serious business. Not so very long ago he had started into the Bad Lands with Mr. Levi and had been five hours covering a mile and getting back into Medora, fighting our magnet's attraction every inch of the way

On one point the six gentlemen were agreed-that Copernicus was too grasping. If they could hammer him down by means of a warrant the opposing factions could take chances on getting the better of each other.

"Are you intendin' to make any trouble?" asked Mr. Mix.

"There are seven of you, as you just informed me," replied Copernicus, "and only two of us. The minority can protest, but I presume that actual resistance is out of the question."

"Worse than useless, Mr. Jones. Of course, I couldn't bring any handcuffs, but if you're going to be peaceable they

won't be needed.'

The sheriff turned to the rest.

"Come on, gents," he proceeded. "Get your horses, and we'll push back to town."

We all passed out of the shanty and started toward the safety-box, where the sheriff had hitched his horse alongside the others.

"We missed it," I heard Hargreaves say to Phipps, "by not including Peck in one of those warrants."

"Peck hasn't done anything," spoke up Copernicus, "Lut he's liable to do a few things while I'm in jail."

"What?" came apprehensively from

all six of the gentlemen.

But Copernicus's answer was a sphinxlike smile, accompanied by a diabolical glint of the eyes.

The six gentlemen took their horses. Mr. Mix endeavored to take his, but ex-

perienced some difficulty.

He had trailed in well to the rear of the gentlemen whose cause he was championing, and had secured his hastily with a thirty-foot lariat. safety-box, hanging between heaven and earth, like Mohammed's coffin, aroused more fearsome speculation in the equine mind of the sheriff's bronco than in any of the other horses.

When Mr. Mix drew near his horse danced away at the end of its long tie-The sheriff swore and lost his temper; and thereupon the bronco made a bad matter worse by running around him, wrapping him in a coil of hemp, and lifting him clear off his feet.

By that time Mr. Mix was both blind and unreasoning. He floundered awk-

wardly, and so enmeshed himself in the riata that it was presently impossible for him to move.

The horse, meanwhile, had bounded so close to Copernicus that he had been able to grasp the bits and pull the noose of the rope over the animal's head.

"Help!" roared Mr. Mix, struggling

"Steady, steady!" shouted Copernicus, running toward him with the noose in his hand.

"I never got in such a fix as this before," remarked the irate sheriff as Co-

pernicus bent over him.

"I don't think you ever did," admitted Copernicus, working around the officer with the noose.

"What you doing?" demanded Mr. Mix. "You ain't untanglin' me!"

"I'm untangling myself," said Copernicus.

The next moment he had straightened erect, run to the chain, and kicked out the pin that held the first steel link to the anchor. There followed a swish, a startled yell, and a twisting form flashed through the air.

The box "chugged" against the apex of the positive pole, Mr. Mix dangling by ten feet of chain and some fifteen feet of riata. Copernicus turned to the six astounded gentlemen who stood holding

their horses.

"Whenever a chance comes my way," said Copernicus, "I try to make the most of it. If you have any more men with warrants, send 'em along. morning to you," and he strode into the house, beckoning to me to follow.

We watched the mysterious six from a window. They got their heads together and held a star-chamber session. Phipps started toward the shanty, but was caught by Hargreaves and pulled back; then, with a final look at the dangling form above, they mounted and cantered off.

"This won't do, Copernicus," said I. "The sheriff's in a desperate plight. If anything happens to him what will become of us?"

"Something has happened to him," returned Copernicus grimly, stepping from the shanty and sizing up the sheriff's position. "He's west of the threshing-machine and just over the old boiler. Gad!" he added, a moment later, "he has swung himself on to the boiler and is busy working clear of the rope. He'll be with us in a few minutes, but I'm not expecting that he will interfere with me when he comes down."

"Hey!" bellowed Mr. Mix, gazing down at us.

"What do you want?" called back

Copernicus blandly.

"There ain't no joke about this," was the savage response, "and you'll find it out before I get through with you. I

want to get down."

"That's easy enough, Mr. Mix. Just edge along to the west end of the boiler and you'll find a row of hooks. Don't get in too much of a hurry and you'll be all right."

"If anything happens to me you fel-

lows'll pay for it!"

"Nothing will happen to you if you

keep your nerve."

We could see the sheriff make his way cautiously along the boiler, poise himself on the edge, and reach out to one of the hooks; then down he came, hook by hook, and at last reached the bottom.

About the same moment Willetts rode in leading the bronco, which had got loose during the excitement and had started for Medora on its own account.

Without a word, Mr. Mix made straight for his horse, vaulted to the animal's back, and left us at a gallop.

"What's been going on here?" asked Willetts, handing over a long envelope containing the professor's reports.

"I had a slight difference with Mr. Mix, that's all," said Copernicus. "What do they think of us in Medora, about now?" he added.

"Everybody's feelin' easier," said Willetts, "'ceptin' the storekeepers that have laid in a supply of winter goods. They ain't so happy as they might be."

"The sun rose on yesterday's time,

didn't it?"

"That's the way it stacks up. People are beginnin' to think you meant what you said a spell ago. A bunch of newspaper men struck town this mornin'. They've got cameras, and a hull lot of other plunder. When I left, the professor was tryin' to head 'em off from comin' out here."

"That's right," said Copernicus;

"keep 'em away. We'll have to put up a wire to-morrow, Peck, and do what we can to take care of ourselves. I don't know what the sheriff will do next, but we must be ready to meet any move he makes."

Willetts usually had dinner with us before starting on his return trip to Medora. While he was picketing out his bronco over in the little valley where I was keeping the horse loaned to me by the professor Copernicus and I went into the shanty to look over the reports.

I was still unstrung because of the events of the morning—particularly the exploit with Mr. Mix, which might easily have turned out a tragedy instead of a farce—but Copernicus was as calm as a day in June. Settling himself before the table, he filled and lighted his pipe, smiled a little at my perturbation, and tore open the envelope.

The very first paper his eyes rested upon brought an involuntary exclama-

tion to his lips.

"What's the rub?" I asked.

"South America has sent an ultimatum to the United States."

"Ultimatum? What sort of an ultimatum?"

"Why, unless the Jones & Peck Solar Supply Company is suppressed inside of sixty days, there'll be war! I guess they're beginning to take some stock in us, Peck. What do you think?"

#### CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR DEFENSE.

"That means," said I, "that the government can't continue to ignore us any longer."

"What can a lot of little South American republics do?" scoffed Copernicus.

"It isn't a matter of what they can do, but of what effect their ultimatum will have. Right is on their side; we can't overlook that. We had the sun last summer, and they're entitled to it while our winter is on. This sort of thing has happened for so long that those fellows below the equator have got accustomed to it. Any other kicks registered at the State Department?"

"Well, Australia seems to have a grievance, and has gone to the home gov-

ernment with it; but England is tickled out of her boots over the balmy atmosphere of Canada and the delightful weather that has descended upon her own tight little island, so Australia, Borneo, and South Africa can't expect much sympathy."

While he talked, Copernicus was running through the reports hurriedly.

"The Czar seems pleased over the prospects for Siberia," he continued, "but he's a little bit incredulous. Europe, it appears, is doing a vast amount of thinking. The general attitude is pessimistic. Jones & Peck have too much power, according to their notion, in a matter concerning so many people.

"A hint comes from Berlin that if we want to do a really great thing we'll pull the axis of the earth over until it is at right angles with the plane of the ecliptic, and thus make days and nights of equal length all over the globe. Not a bad idea that, Ira. Normally, you know, the axis is out of plumb some twenty-three and one-half degrees. Of course, our magnet hasn't really drawn the sun back north of the equator; it's the sun that's drawn the magnet. See? The pole has been pulled farther down. I really don't know just how much it has been tilted, although I suppose I could figure it out."

"Don't!" I begged. "Let it go as

"The professor," pursued Copernicus, "says that the eyes of the world are turned toward the Bad Lands of North Dakota, and that not all are friendly. The Premier of Canada is out with a proposition for us to move our 'works' across the border. Fancy that! I suppose he thinks we're running a factory and turning the raw material of winter into a finished article of chinook winds. So far as I know, there's only one spot on earth where we could find the natural advantages necessary to pull off a deal like this, and that's right here; and we couldn't do it in any other part of the Nature makes one ·Bad Lands, either. butte like this Horseshoe affair and then she breaks the mold."

In this wise, after his usual fashion, Copernicus went through the reports. I have no doubt that he was impressed, as I was, with our critical situation.

The age had passed when might made right. The powerful nations north of the equator that were benefiting through our control of the seasons would have to listen to the weaker peoples in the south out of mere humanity, if nothing more.

"A few days more of this, Copernicus," said I, "and we'll have to give up.

It's coming."

"We won't have to give up until we're

bought off," he answered.

"But if an army is sent against us?"
"Well, we'll have a choice collection of Krag-Jörgensens, swords, knapsacks, and soldier-gear added to the assortment up there," and he gave his hand an upward sweep in the direction of the window

"They will know how to come after us," I assured him. "By this time, everybody around here knows what tactics to pursue in crossing the magnetic field. When the soldiers come they will come with bludgeons, fall on the batterycells and demolish them, and then, perhaps, fall on us and do the same thing."

"Oh, no, they won't! Half a day's work, Peck, will make our position here

impregnable."

Willetts came in just then, and we set about getting dinner. The meal over and a friendly pipe indulged in, our courier saddled up and started on his return iourney.

As soon as he was out of sight Copernicus took down several coils of copper wire from certain pegs in the house

where they had been hanging.

"I have been saving this wire," said he, "for defensive purposes. You will observe that it is not insulated; that is so it can radiate the protective energy along its entire length—if it becomes necessary."

His next move was to pull from under the shanty armful after armful of stakes. They were about two feet long, and were fitted at the blunt end with an aluminum ring whose interior circumference was coated with some non-conducting material. The rings were open at the top, so that the copper wire might be bent into them.

Armed with a couple of mallets, we encircled butte and battery-cells with a row of stakes. After that the wire was

strung, one end connected with the positive pole of the cells recently disconnected from our main battery, and the other end connected with the negative pole. By means of insulated wires, both positive and negative ends were then carried into the house and attached to platinum posts in the top of a box which I had never seen before.

The box was in the form of a fourfoot cube, with a switch similar to the one on our switchboard.

"A contrivance of my own," explained Copernicus, patting the box affectionately. "It is capable of great things in the way of a current. In defending this position, Ira, not a life will be lost; at the same time, our defense will be complete."

An hour after our work was finished Copernicus had an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of our defensive appliance. A blanket Indian, on a scrawny cayuse, came poking into our

magnetic zone.

There was nothing about the Indian or his horse that the magnet could lay hold of. If the redskin had been armed with knife or gun, the butte had already claimed them.

"I'm not going to hurt him," said Copernicus, peering from the window.

"Watch what happens, Ira."

My friend's hand dropped to the ebony handle of the switch. The Indian, evidently very much surprised at what he saw, approached slowly.

"How far is he from the wire?"

queried Copernicus.

"Thirty feet, I should say," I answered.

"That will do," and Copernicus

jerked the ebony handle.

Like a flash, horse and rider dropped in their tracks. There was not a sound—simply a flutter of the red blanket—and the two living objects were prostrate.

"That," said Copernicus, "is what

the wire can do at thirty feet."

He threw the switch back, and the dazed red man got up and hopped around after his restive cayuse. The instant he got on the pony's back he cut for the neighboring buttes.

"That wire," I remarked, "appears

to work at long range."

"That's where this improved appliance comes in," laughed my companion, once more patting the box.

"Wouldn't it be possible to cut the

wire?"

"If we are watchful no one will get close enough to the wire to cut it. But even if a person did get close enough, he could hardly break the wire with a club. As for using nippers, or a file, our magnet would take care of every instrument of that sort."

Every point of our defensive program was thoroughly covered. We had a store of food; and while the creek where I was keeping the professor's horse was too far away to furnish us with water in case of a siege, the recent rain had filled to the brimming-point some of the cup-shaped depressions within our protected area—depressions so small that we had not used them as battery-cells.

If we got out of water and wanted more, we had but to disturb the current flowing into Horseshoe Butte in order to bring down a deluge and replenish our tanks. This move, of course, would be adopted only as a last resort. Stirring up an earthquake was out of the question except in case of a crisis.

As we sat over our pipes that evening, I will acknowledge frankly that I was highly elated. Even the world in arms

could not prevail against us.

But I am naturally of a charitable disposition. And while I sat there in the semi-gloom with Copernicus an idea came to me that rather cooled my jubilant mood.

"The government," said I, "taking the part of humanity in seeking to restrain us in our work, will brand us as heartless reprobates if we resist."

"Are we more heartless than the prime movers in any other monopoly?" was my friend's caustic response. "We have our price, and are willing to be bought off. The situation is in our hands—we have a bulldog grip on it. It will be cheaper for the government to buy us off than to attempt to run us out."

"Nevertheless," said I, "we shall be

"Nevertheless," said I, "we shall be held up to obloquy and scorn by all

right-thinking people."

"The sensation will be unpleasant, I admit, Ira, but we shall be well paid for these disagreeable things."

So the matter rested, but the serpent of doubt was not scotched, and I continued to fret over that aspect of the matter.

The 17th passed, and for the first time since our silent partner had gone on duty at Medora no courier arrived.

"Nothing of importance has occurred, I suppose," said Copernicus, "so Willetts has concluded to miss a day."

The 18th likewise passed without bringing Willetts; and the 19th, 20th, and 21st.

Copernicus's explanation no longer satisfied me—or himself, either. It was absolutely certain that momentous events were happening, and we were compelled to remain at Horseshoe Butte in utter ignorance of them.

Our apprehensions ran riot, and included every sort of misfortune that our minds could conjure up. On the night of the 21st it was agreed that if no word came by ten o'clock the following morning I should mount the professor's horse and fare cautiously in the direction of Medora in an attempt to discover what was going on.

But Willets was with us by sunrise. His face was very grave and his manner most portentous as he dropped off his horse.

"Well," said he gruesomely, "the fat's in the fire. I haven't been out here for several days, because the United States marshal wouldn't let me come."

"Wouldn't let you come?" echoed Copernicus.

"I should say not. If I tried it I was to be arrested and locked up."

"Couldn't the professor get some one else to come?"

"The professor! Why, he was worse off than me. A deputy marshal has had him cooped up in an hotel. The old maid put the marshal next to what the professor was doin'."

"You mean Miss Elizabeth?"

"Sure. The old girl has found out the professor was mixed up with you fellers, an' she's danced the medicine an' gone on the war-path. Mebby she'll decide to march out here an' put your magnet out of commission. Blamed if I know. Orders have gone out that not a soul is to come within twenty-five miles of Horseshoe Butte. The marshal is back of the orders, an' he's actin' for the gov'ment. You're up ag'inst it, that's what you are.''

"How are matters progressing in the

outside world, Willetts?"

"Worse. Every one's ag'inst you. Mix started the agitation in Medora, an' if one o' you men show your nose outside the range of attraction it's you to the lock-up, muy pronto."

"How has the sun been acting?"

"You're holdin' it down to a hair. But your success is causin' all the trouble. Now that people know you can do as you say, they're skeered."

"How did you manage to get away to

come out here this morning?"

"The marshal asked me to come. I've brought a line from him. Here it is."

Willetts handed over a letter addressed to "The Jones & Peck Solar Supply Company, Horseshoe Butte." It read as follows:

By order of the government, I hereby call upon Copernicus Jones and Ira Xerxes Peck to deliver themselves into my hands, in the town of Medora, within twenty-four hours from receipt of this communication; and immediately upon receipt of it to cease manipulating the seasons and restore them at once to their normal rotation. Unless this demand is complied with, there will be a resort to force.

I must have gone white and shown

other signs of trepidation.

"Brace up, Ira," said Copernicus. "A bold front now will save the day. I will write an answer to this, Willetts," he added, turning to the messenger. "How long can you be with us?"

"I was allowed until noon to make the round trip," answered Willetts. "I'll have to start back right away."

"I won't detain you more than five minutes,"

Copernicus's letter was brief and to the point. With the idea of benefiting our country, he stated, we had gone to a great deal of expense; we must be reimbursed, not only for our original outlay, but for prospective profits which would be lost by the curtailment of our operations. For one billion dollars we would step down and out, leaving the seasons as we had found them.

It was an audacious letter, but was

written by a man who had audacity for the key-note of his character. As Willetts rode away Copernicus and I stood looking after him until the buttes closed in and shut him from our sight.

"We have thrown down the gauntlet

to the government," said my companion, "and incidentally to the wide, wide world. How do you feel about it, Ira?"

"In for a shilling, in for a pound," said I gloomily; "but I wish we were out of it."

(To be continued.)

# STRANGELY ENTANGLED.

BY CHARLES CAREY.

Certain remarkable experiences that came to a man following up his own past on a slender thread.

T.

## A MAN WITHOUT KINDRED.

Ellis Blair, secretary and general manager of the Great Atlantic Exporting and Importing Company, has been mysteriously missing for the past ten days, and despite the most rigorous search, no clue can be obtained as to

his present whereabouts.

None of the usual reasons for such a disappearance seem to apply in this case, nor does there seem good cause to suspect foul play. Indeed, the man's friends and business associates profess to be at their wits' end to offer any explanation whatever for the strange affair.-From the New York Clarion, August 13, 1904.

E LLIS BLAIR was like Topsy. For all he knew to the contrary, he

had "just growed."

A friend of his, a writer of stories for the magazines, looking enviously at him, one day, remarked: "What an ideal character for fiction you would make, Blair! In working out a plot and concealing necessary circumstances one is always butting into some aunt, or cousin, or sister who by the very nature of things would have to be acquainted with the real facts; but you seem to have no kinsfolk of any kind. Long as I have known you, I have never heard you mention a single relative."

Blair brushed over the implied question with a hurried laugh. He was a little sensitive about the mystery of his origin, and never referred to it.

"I a character for fiction?" he cried.

reverting to his companion's earlier words. "Absurd! Why, there isn't any more romance about me than there is about a bank-book. I am simply a plodding, prosaic man of business."

In this estimate of himself he spoke nothing but the truth. A man of business he was, and a man of business he had been since the time he was fifteen

years old.

He could well recall the circumstances which had led to his entering upon a commercial career. His teacher had kept him in at school because he had refused to commit to memory a piece of poetry which had been given to the class as an exercise.

At dinner, that evening, old Horace McCutcheon, with whom he made his home, inquired as to what had made him so late; and Ellis, with a boyish assumption of having been treated with injustice, told of his clash with the teacher.

"But why wouldn't you learn the piece for her?" questioned the old man

"Aw, what's the use?" growled the boy disgustedly. "That sort of stuff don't earn you any money. Now, 'rithmetic or j'ography—there's some sense to that."

McCutcheon made no answer to this outburst, but sat several moments studying the boy in silence underneath his bushy brows. Finally he asked irrelevantly: "How old are you, Ellis?"

"I'll be sixteen next February"-

with a challenging air.

"And this is March," smiled Me-

Cutcheon; "so you are in fact just turned fifteen. "I had not thought," he added musingly, "that you were quite so old."

He said nothing more at the time, but during the remainder of the evening he was plainly absorbed in meditation. The next morning he told Ellis that if he so desired he might give up school and take a position in the store.

"I never believed in driving an unwilling horse to water," he said; "and I judge from your remarks last night that your inclination lies more toward commercial lines."

Young Blair was enchanted at the prospect. He cared nothing for books; his only ambition was to be doing things which were of "some use." He took more pride in the humble position accorded him than a French poet would upon his election to the "Academy of the Immortals."

Ellis's teachers had complained of his laziness and inattention; there was no ground for any such criticism on his deportment in his new vocation. He was always on hand, always prompt, always accurate, always willing.

The truth was, the boy had "found himself." The bent of his mind was toward a business life, and in any other environment he was like a fish out of water.

For six years he worked under Mr. McCutcheon's directing eye, and proved himself so faithful, discreet, and intelligent that he was finally advanced to the position of confidential man in the concern, second in importance only to the head of the house.

Then, a few more days before Ellis's twenty-first birthday, his employer died suddenly as the result of an apoplectic stroke, never recovering consciousness from the moment of his seizure. His will made Ellis Blair the sole legatee of his estate, but, strangely enough, did not mention or intimate in any way the existence of a relationship between them.

Nor did a comprehensive search of his papers and effects throw any further light upon this question. In fact, no papers were found of a date earlier than that on which he had appeared in New York, some nincteen years before.

He had then been a man over forty

years of age; but so completely had he burned his bridges behind him, so sedulously did he seem to have destroyed every trace which might have given a hint as to his former career, that his executors and heir had at last to confess themselves baffled—hopelessly perplexed.

Blair, especially, took pains to investigate all possible sources of information; but in no case was he able to unearth the slightest clue. McCutcheon's bankers remembered only that he had come to them without introduction or reference of any kind other than the rather heavy deposit he had tendered them, which was, strangely enough, all in currency, and which he brought to them in a little satchel.

His housekeeper, who had lived with him for years, stated that he had given her no information concerning himself, simply employing her to care for the brownstone mansion which he bought in a retired neighborhood, and to look after the little two-year-old boy who formed the other member of his household.

The friends and business associates he had made were equally ignorant. Never, to the remembrance of any of them, had McCutcheon fallen into the least reference to his past, or to his manner of life before coming among them.

Even the old register of the hotel at which the man first stopped upon his arrival in New York, when hunted out and examined, gave no enlightening hint. The inscription upon its yellowed pages simply ran: "Horace McCutcheon and boy, New York."

Nor, finally, to Ellis himself had the old merchant ever unbosomed himself, either as to the origin of either of them or as to the ties of blood, if any, which existed between them.

As the boy had grown older and had begun to comprehend something of the anomalous position in which he stood, he had more than once pressed for an explanation, but had always been put off with the promise that all would be told him on his twenty-first birthday.

Now, by the interposition of death, this promise had been nullified; leaving Blair with nothing but an interrogation-mark to answer who he was or whence he came.

To the young man, brought face to face with the problem, none of the usual explanations that might account for such an association as that between Mc-Cutcheon and himself seemed to apply.

He had never been taught to call his protector "papa," or "uncle," or "guardian," or any other name which might designate a relationship between them, but simply "Mr. McCutcheon." Nor had the manner of McCutcheon ever hinted at the tie of kinship. He had been uniformly kind and indulgent to the boy, it is true; but always in a detached, impersonal way, and without the slightest suggestion of a parental character.

Another strange circumstance was that he had never held out to Blair any expectation that he intended making the latter his heir, but, on the contrary, had always rather intimated that in due time the boy would have to shuffle for himself

Once, in a rarely confidential mood, he had said while on this subject: "I do not want you to build any false hopes by reason of our association, Ellis. There are others who have a better right to my money than you."

No, try as he might, Blair could discover no solution to the enigma. Self-contained, reticent, secretive, Horace McCutcheon had left no key which by any manipulation seemed able to open that closed door to his past.

As to Ellis's own recollections of his brief infancy prior to arrival in New York, they were vague, shadowy, and confused. He did have a faint memory of other surroundings than those which had become so familiar to him in his later childhood; of a place where there were trees and flowers, and cows and horses.

He could also dimly recall the sweet face of a woman who had leaned over him as he lay in his little crib, and remembered, too, a long journey he had taken under the care of McCutcheon; but where this place was, or who the woman, or whence the journey, he was naturally unable to determine.

He did not even know, as he told himself, that his benefactor's real name had been McCutcheon, or his own Ellis Blair. Nor, he finally became satisfied, would he ever know. The curtain was irrevocably drawn, the door closed.

Whether behind it lurked the shadow of a crime or a great and overmastering sorrow, or merely the whim of an odd man's eccentricity, he would never learn.

Convinced at last of this fact, Blair gave no further consideration to the matter, but absorbed himself in those business schemes which were his delight and his passion. He had a free hand now to put into execution all the ambitious projects which he had long cherished, but from which he had hitherto been restrained by the conservatism of McCutcheon.

He organized a stock company, installed himself as secretary and general manager, and in the short space of five years made it the largest and most powerful institution of its kind in the world.

He had agents in every commercial center upon the face of the globe, he handled everything in the line of merchandise from false teeth to locomotives, he maintained a banking and financial department of high rating, operated a line of coasting and also of ocean steamers, and even published a trade journal devoted to the interests of his establishment. And over all this he, a young man not yet twenty-six years old, ruled with an absolute hand.

It goes without saying, however, that such results were not brought about save by hard work. Ellis Blair never spared himself, and he permitted no shirking on the part of his subordinates. Knowing his business from the ground up, he was well aware of the precise amount of work due him from each of his employees, and he exacted it in full measure.

He was business all day and every day. Business with him was a hobby—his delight, his pleasure, his pastime.

He saw his wealth pile up, and his influence grow; but he did not on that account relax in the slightest degree his strenuous energy, nor did he change his habits. He kept on living in the old brownstone house which had been bequeathed to him by Horace McCutcheon, and he plunged into none of those extravagances which ordinarily separate a young man of means from his money.

He abjured society entirely, and it is doubtful if he spoke to a woman, outside of his stenographer and his housekeeper, once in a twelvemonth. His tastes were quiet and simple, his friends few and mostly of the same character as himself, and his routine as rigorous as that of a soldier.

In short, he lived solely for his business—not for what his business might bring him, but for the love of the business itself.

True, he fitted up for himself a most expensive gymnasium, and every evening, whenever the weather permitted, took a long ride on his bicycle; but this was all a part of his scheme. His health was necessary to the proper conduct of his affairs; therefore, he safeguarded his health by these methods.

For the same reason, although sorely against his will, he forced himself, every summer, to take a three weeks' vacation; and in order to get the full benefit of these occasions, always made a long, solitary trip awheel. From these jaunts he would return browned, clear-eyed, refreshed, ready to take up another year of his unremitting toil.

Thus it happened that, August having come around again, and the appointed time for his period of recreation, Blair started to plan out a route. He had about decided that this year he would try a run up through New England, and if pressed for time on his return would come back by boat from Portland.

It was the evening of the day before his departure, and he was packing some necessary articles—a change of linen and the like—into the traveling-case which he carried on his bicycle.

For this purpose, he started to get something out of a drawer in the old-fashioned bureau which stood in his room—the same room, it may be remarked, that McCutcheon had used prior to the time of his death—but, to his annoyance, found that the drawer stuck.

An impatient jerk at the handles loosened it, but its obstinacy aroused his curiosity sufficiently to make him examine the aperture. Then he found that a fragment of an old letter had fallen down behind and worked its way into the slide.

The paper was so torn by his efforts to pull the drawer open, and the ink so paled by time, that he was unable to decipher any of the body of the missive; but across the top he could make out faintly, in a woman's delicate handwriting, the word "Yoctangee," followed by a date corresponding to that of the year in which McCutcheon had first come to New York.

Inspired now by a lively conception, Ellis ransacked the old bureau from top to bottom, almost tearing it to pieces in his eager search; but the only reward he achieved was to get himself covered with dust and lint. Not another scrap of paper lurked within its recesses.

Then he tried a strong glass upon his find, in the hope that he might thus reconstruct some of its faded sentences; but this proved equally fruitless. All that he could hope to glean from his discovery was the simple name and the date

"It's useless," he finally muttered, pushing the torn and illegible letter away from him. "Anyway, it simply opens up the old question which I had resolved never to let bother me again."

With that he completed his preparations for his trip and went to bed; but before doing so he carefully folded up the letter and placed it in an inner compartment of his pocket-book.

The next morning he was up betimes, and leaving a few final directions with his housekeeper, started off, following the course of those streets and avenues which now form the route once covered by the old Boston post-road.

It was one of those fresh, clear mornings when all nature seems to cry to the wayfarer, "Come, rejoice with me"; but Blair appeared oblivious to the beauty of the day. He pedaled steadily along, his brows bent in thought, so heedless of his surroundings, indeed, that more than once he only narrowly escaped collision with some passing vehicle.

"Yoctangee? Yoctangee?" he kept muttering to himself. "Where in the dickens have I heard that name before?"

It seemed to stir some deep chord of a far-away memory.

"Is it the name of a city, a hamlet, or merely of some private manor?" he wondered.

Engrossed in these conjectures, he reeled off several miles, then suddenly halted and threw back his head, as

though an inspiration had presented itself to him. His decision was evidently quickly taken. He turned his wheel and rode back along his route faster than he had come.

Directly to the Grand Central Station he proceeded, and there sought the bureau of information.

"Is there any such town as Yoctan-

gee?" he asked a bit diffidently.

"Yoctangee?" returned the man at the desk. "Oh, yes; quite a thriving little city out in Ohio by that name."

"Ohio, eh?"—cogitatively. "And that is the only place of the name?"

His informant consulted a gazetteer to make certain.

"Yep," he finally affirmed, "that is the only one."

"Ah, thank you. And now, please,

how does one get there?"

The functionary, with one eye on the time-table, rattled off succinct directions, and Blair noting the hour of the train mentioned as the best one to take glanced apprehensively at his watch. He had only five minutes in which to make it.

He hesitated just a second; then, with an air of quick determination, he strode

over to the ticket-office.

"Give me a ticket to Yoctangee," he said; "one way."

#### 11

# A SCRAPED ACQUAINTANCE AND A BIG SURPRISE.

ONCE seated in the Pullman, and gliding smoothly along by the Hudson on his way toward Albany, Blair had an opportunity to reflect upon the enterprise which he had so impulsively undertaken.

He was an exceptionally methodical and orderly person in his mental processes, and consequently such a harebrained venture as this was entirely for-

eign to his disposition.

Not that he was slow in decision, for no man could have succeeded so wonderfully in business who was of faltering or procrastinating habits, but he preserved a proper and judicious caution; he was accustomed to turn a subject over and inspect both sides of it before he definitely made up his mind. Now, however, he had rushed off on the spur of a moment, acting, as he told himself, with the heedless impetuosity of a boy. "What have I to go on?" he asked himself. "The mere name of a town, and a date which appears coincidental. How do I know that the writer of that letter had any knowledge of the antecedents of McCutcheon or myself? It may have been upon the most indifferent topics. Furthermore, what assurance have I that there is any chance of tracing up this unknown feminine correspondent of old Horace's? A lot of changes can take place in twenty years; and even though she may have lived in Yoctangee at that time, she may now be dead, or long since moved away.

"Nor will direct inquiry concerning McCutcheon be likely to help me, since it is more than probable that the name he bore was an assumed one, and that my own is also. Finally, am I not a fool to try to rake up a possibly shameful past? Is it not far better to let sleeping dogs lie? In short, is not this wild-goose chase of mine about the craziest hazard that a sane man ever entered upon?"

Excellent logic, all of it; but Ellis Blair was not one who, having put his hand to the plow, could be easily induced to turn back, and even as he reasoned the case out he was more than ever confirmed in his determination to pursue his suddenly taken purpose.

There was a chance, if nothing else, that he might learn something; this letter was the first definite clue ever afforded him to penetrate the veil of mystery which enveloped his birth; and his curiosity forbade him stopping short of anything less than a full investigation.

But suppose he did find out? The thought kept obtruding upon his mind. Suppose he were able to unearth the whole truth? Would it make him any happier, or more at ease? Common sense seemed inevitably to answer, No.

Blair's mind reverted whimsically to those humorous cartoons he had so often laughed over in the evening papers wherein some unfortunate wight is gradually raised to the pinnacle of his desires and then suddenly let drop with a dull, sickening thud.

He found himself unconsciously paraphrasing their legends to fit his own case: "Suppose you had inherited some money, and by using it judiciously had elevated yourself to a position of wealth and influence in the metropolis; and suppose you had always regarded in a romantic light a certain mystery in your life. If you suddenly discovered that this mystery was only a cloak to cover up disgrace, and that the basis of your fortune was actually gained by sneak-thievery—wouldn't it jar you?"

Yes, he had to confess it would " jar "

him considerably.

He had always been a model of rectitude in his dealings. He was proud of the reputation for integrity that he had won—proud of the fact that men were more willing to accept his simple word than many another man's bond; and he shrank from the possible stigma of dishonor being attached to that honorable name.

Nevertheless, he wavered not a whit in his decision to carry this thing through. He shut his teeth hard, and told himself that if there were any way of doing it he was at last going to find out just who and what he was, no matter how personally unpalatable the truths of such a discovery might prove to be.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he characteristically dismissed the subject from his mind for the present, and prepared to bury himself in a magazine which he had bought from the train-boy.

During the course of his reverie he had been gazing steadily out of the window, his brows bent into a frown, his gaze disinterestedly taking in the changing panorama of river scenery as it flew along.

Now, however, as he turned about in his seat, his eyes met squarely those of a young woman who sat facing him a few feet farther along the aisle. Thereafter it was useless for him even to pretend an interest in his book. At every page he found himself raising his glance for a sly peep at this neighbor of his.

It has been remarked hitherto, I believe, that Blair cared little for feminine society. Strange as it may appear, this young man of twenty-six had never in all his life had an experience even approximating to a love-affair.

At last, however, the little blind god was about to take full requital for all those snubs and slights which had been imposed upon him.

The first glance from those laughing blue eyes struck Blair like a shock of five hundred volts of electricity. The second glance he took at her confirmed him in his previous impression—that she was the loveliest creature who had ever donned a sailor hat and a trim traveling-costume. At the third glance he was hopelessly, drivelingly, head over heels in love.

The first effect of his new state was to render him morbidly conscious of his own appearance. A sudden suspicion shot into his brain that, owing to his wild rush to catch the train, his hair might be tousled, and even—oh, horrible conjecture!—that his face might be slightly dirty.

He groaned in spirit, and cursed his economical tendencies, because he had not seen fit to provide himself with new raiment before setting out on his trip.

Just then, in stealing another peep, he chanced to intercept a glance of the girl bestowed in his own direction, which served to barb the criticisms he had just been passing.

Coloring to the roots of his hair, he leaped out of his seat and dived down the aisle toward the dressing-room, where he spent a good fifteen minutes in reducing his curly mop to submission and in brushing up his attire until it looked as if it had just come out of the hands of a valet.

Then, with an air of fine preoccupation, he sauntered back to his seat and resumed the fascinating pastime of casting sheep's-eyes at his divinity.

Trust a woman to know when incense is being burned before her shrine.

The girl's mien was utterly unconscious. She stared fixedly out of the window for the most part, only occasionally allowing her gaze to stray indifferently hither and thither about the car; but another of her sex would have augured much from the fact that never once did any of these casual glances venture in the direction of Blair.

Another woman would also have noticed frequent surreptitious peeps into the panel mirror between the windows, followed by apparently careless, but none the less coquettish, little pats at her hair or at the bow she wore at her throat.

There was no lolling upon a pillow on the arm of the car-seat for this girl; no disheveled hair, nor disarrayed garments. She sat straight up, not stiffly, but with a lithe erectness which bespoke an independent nature; and she was as spick and span as though she had just stepped out of a bandbox.

Even Blair's unsophisticated eye readily perceived that she was not one of the

lolling kind.

She might not be a very large personage, but she gave the impression that she was abundantly able to take care of herself. There was a freshness and a wholesomeness about her—an alert, businesslike decision in all her movements—which pointed her out as a kindred spirit to Ellis and especially appealed to him.

She had smooth, glossy, dark hair, a clear olive complexion, and, as already stated, honest blue eyes, with a glint of laughter in their depths. Her chin was strong enough to imply that she had a very pretty will of her own and her nose was rather uncompromising; but her mouth betrayed the woman.

It was the mouth of a typical Irish colleen—framed for laughter, and coax-

ing, and kisses.

Just at present, however, the rose-leaf curves of that mouth were drawn into a prim, straight line, and mademoiselle's whole attitude and bearing announced very plainly that she was not to be inveigled into flirting with the good-looking young stranger across the way, no matter how wildly the little blind god might be scampering around in the vicinity.

She took a paper and pencil out of her bag and sedulously absorbed herself in the toting up of some figures, apparently totally oblivious to the brown eyes on the other side of the car which were so humbly pleading for recognition.

But the little blind god has a way of arranging these matters without asking any one's consent, and presently a playful gust of wind whisked in at the open window, tore the paper out of the fair calculator's hand, and bore it triumphantly across the car to deposit it directly at Ellis Blair's feet.

Picking it up, he stalked solemnly across the aisle and poked it at her with-

out a word. He was really so embarrassed that he could not frame a sentence to save his soul; his face flamed up as red as a boiled lobster.

The girl gravely thanked him, and resumed her interrupted calculations. He kicking himself, figuratively speaking, over his failure to take advantage of his opportunities, hastily sought the seclusion of the smoking-compartment, and there spent the remainder of the day in solitary penance.

But fate was kinder to him than he deserved. When he went to the dining-car for dinner that evening he found only one seat vacant, and that at a table already occupied by the fascinating un-

known.

Awkwardly he slid into it, hardly daring to lift his eyes to her face; but when he did so he was raised to the seventh heaven of bliss, for she greeted him with a curt little nod of recognition. True, she did not follow this up by any further unbending, and Ellis was too shy to offer any advances on his own part; but, nevertheless, all that evening he was in vastly better cheer.

The ice had been broken between them, and he promised himself with that unyielding determination for which he was famous that it should remain in that

state.

By skilful maneuvering and a system of generous "tipping" he managed to reproduce the same conditions at breakfast on the following morning.

Once more did he sit down with the young lady as his vis-à-vis. She bowed, as before, and after that, as before, concerned herself entirely with the viands spread before her. Blair had to confess that he was not making much progress. The meal progressed in a silence so thick that it could be felt.

Finally, the girl having successfully extricated a boiled egg from its shell, glanced up at him with a mirthful flash in her blue eyes.

"Why are you so set on knowing me?" she asked coolly. "I confess I am all at sea. Ever since yesterday morning you have been making the most strenuous attempts to provoke an acquaintance; yet you are not at all the type of the traveling 'masher.' If you were," she added, surveying him ju-

dicially, "you might be better on to your job."

Now, a straight attack of this sort, right out from the shoulder, was the surest way in the world to put Blair at his ease. Of a frank and open disposition himself, he could understand and meet candor in another.

No longer flustered and embarrassed, he returned her questioning gaze with

an ingenuous and friendly smile.

"I guess I am not much of a diplomat," he laughed, "to have given away my hand to you as easily as that. You are right, though; I have been trying to scrape an acquaintance with you. Why? I don't know, unless it is that I saw we were both traveling alone and I thought that perhaps we might be able to mutually lighten the tedium of a long journey.

"I'm sorry," he added contritely, "if

I have offended you."

"You haven't," she replied calmly; "not at all. I have simply been thinking how foolish it was that you should have had to go to so much trouble and artifice in order to get to speak a few words with me. Now, if I had been a man you would have thought nothing of stepping across the aisle and entering into conversation with me, nor would I have felt the least restraint about addressing another woman. Why, then, should we have sat dumb as stone bottles merely because we happen to belong to opposite sexes? It is downright idiocy."

She wrinkled up her nose in supreme disgust at the traditions of convention.

Ellis was not slow to take advantage of the opening thus afforded him, and he fairly surprised himself by the quickness and flow of his speech under the stimulating influence of her interest.

They finished the breakfast, so stiffly begun, in a gale of animated conversation, and when they adjourned once more to the sleeper the girl obligingly moved over her belongings so as to make room

for him to sit beside her.

In the course of one of their discussions it came out that she was a business woman, the head of an establishment for the manufacture of automobiles, and he was surprised on probing her to find out what a complete and

comprehensive grasp she had of the conditions of that industry.

"It seems a funny kind of an enterprise for a woman to be in, doesn't it?" she commented. "But I have been brought up to it, in a way. I received all my business training in one of the first automobile factories established in this country, and so got to know the ins and outs of the trade. Consequently, when I came into a legacy and decided to start out on my own hook nothing was more natural than that I should continue in the same line. I have a partner," she explained, "who looks after the mechanical end of the concern, while I run the office."

"And you have made a success of it?"
"Oh, yes. Even more than we hoped for. In fact, it is on account of our big success that I am making this trip. We've got to enlarge our plant, you see,

and we have received several offers of bonuses and inducements to move it elsewhere. I am on my road now to investigate an offer which has been made us at Yoctangee."

"At Yoctangee?" exclaimed Blair. "Why, that is where I am bound my-

self."

"Really? And, if it isn't being too inquisitive, what business is taking you out to Yoctangee?"

"Oh," stammered the man, "I want—that is, there are one or two people

there I would like to interview."

"I see," nodding her head sagely. "That's a polite way of telling me that it's none of my business. All right; I merely asked because I thought I might be able to put you on to one or two things about the people you are going to meet. You see, I came from that town myself, originally, and I know about everybody in the place."

"You do?" cried Ellis excitedly.
"Then perhaps you may have heard of a man who once lived there by the name

of McCutcheon?"

"No"—striving to recollect—"I don't think there were ever any Mc-Cutcheons there. At least, none that I ever knew of."

"Well, then," pursued the other, "perhaps some one by the name of Blair?"

She broke into a gay laugh.

"Just slightly," she returned. "Since my own name happens to be Evelyn Blair!"

## III.

SOME INFORMATION BY THE WAY.

A HUNDRED eager questions trembled on the tip of Blair's tongue, but he did not have time to ask them, for just at that opportune moment the conductor poked his head in at the door, with the stentorian announcement: "Columbus! Change cars!"

A glance out of the window revealed to him the presence of streets and houses. Indeed, they were rapidily running into Ohio's capital city, and already the passengers were hastily collecting their belongings and submitting to the mercenary

ministrations of the porter.

Ellis assisted his companion to gather up her various parcels, and insisted on carrying her suit-case up the steps and

along the platform.

"Perhaps you know what we have to do now in order to reach our common destination," he remarked as he trudged along beside her; "for my part, I have to confess that I came away in such a rush I didn't have time to inquire."

"To be sure, I know," she responded gaily. "This part of the world is my native heath, you must understand, and if you will only follow my lead you are certain not to go wrong. We must wait here for a half-hour or so, and then we will take passage on the D. N. and Q., a little jerk-water road, which, if we have luck, will get us home about four o'clock this afternoon. Yoctangee is only about a hundred miles away; but——

"O-oh!" she suddenly interrupted herself, and stopped short to gaze in chagrin at a legend chalked large upon the big bulletin-board which announced the

arrival and departure of trains.

This stated simply that on account of heavy floods and the destruction of a bridge on its lower division, all trains over the D. N. and Q. would be annulled for that day.

"And now what to do?" she cried

vexedly, turning to Blair.

"You wait here," he replied, "and I'll see if I can't find out something."

With that he hurried off to seek some one in authority; but he was destined to

extract little comfort from the report given him.

An official, tired out by a long stream of questioners, curtly informed him that there had been heavy rains in the lower part of the State—one of those summer freshets which turn the usually placid watercourses of that region into raging torrents for the time being. Owing to these floods, a bridge or two had been swept out, and the D. N. and Q. was consequently unable to furnish service.

"But how soon will they be able to send out a train?" queried Ellis ur-

gently.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps to-morrow. Perhaps the day after. Certainly not to-day."

Blair returned to his companion with a despondent visage; but all the same there was a tumultuous joy in his heart.

By stress of this unlooked-for delay their unconventional comradeship would have to be maintained on its present basis for a day, perhaps two days, longer. Providence had seen fit to maroon them together on a foreign shore; and, whether she wished to or not, she would have to rely upon his masculine guardianship.

"I am afraid there is no possible show for us to get out to-day," he said, with hypocritical grumblings; "they say they may be able to run a train through to-morrow, but even that is uncertain. Furthermore, as all other roads in that direction are in the same box, there seems no feasible way of going around. So I guess all there is left for us is to go to some hotel and possess our souls in patience until the D. N. and Q. sees fit to let us leave."

"Ye-es," she admitted hesitatingly, "under the circumstances, that does seem about the only thing to do."

But while they stood debating their colloquy was suddenly interrupted by the swish of feminine draperies, and the next moment a fashionably attired young woman cast herself upon Evelyn with loud and excited vociferations.

"Why, Evelyn Blair!" she exclaimed.

"Of all persons in the world! I saw you from across the station only this minute; but I just knew that I couldn't be mistaken. Papa and I were going back home"—talking very fast and at the top of her lungs—"because that

bothersome old train isn't going to Yoctangee. And at the door somebody stepped on the tail of my gown, and I turned around and saw you. Just think! If it hadn't been for that blessed man walking all over my skirt I would never have known that you were in town."

Ellis inwardly cursed the awkward blunderer who had served as deus ex

machina for this reunion.

"But why are you here?" rattled on the strange girl. "Though, of course, it's because you are in the same box as ourselves and can't get down to Yoctangee. Well, they say that maybe there won't be a train out for a week, so you'll just have to come out to our house and stay until there is one. You didn't know we were living in Columbus now, did you? Papa and I moved up here more than a year ago."

"I had thought of going to an hotel," demurred Evelyn diffidently, when at last she was able to edge in a word.

"Go to an hotel, indeed," protested the other indignantly, "when we are living right here in the city? I'd just like to see you try anything of the kind! Why, I've got loads and loads of things to tell you. No; you'll stay at our house and nowhere else, if we have to drag you out there by main force. Here comes papa, now, to help me tell you so."

And she frisked lightly off to seize upon a solid, elderly looking gentleman with gray side-whiskers who was making his way slowly through the crowded

station toward them.

Evelyn had been so taken aback by the sudden assault upon her that she seemed to have quite forgotten the presence of her cavalier, who during the interlude stood humbly to one side with the grips in his hands; but now she turned to him with swift interrogation.

"For Heaven's sake, tell me your name," she demanded, in a rapid aside. "I haven't the slightest idea in the

world."

Not comprehending the reason of this request, and forgetting that in their short acquaintance he had never vouch-safed to her any name whatever, he responded in a flurried way: "Ellis. My name is Ellis."

A moment later he divined the purpose of the question and would eagerly

have corrected himself, but it was then too late. The strange girl had come up, dragging her father triumphantly in tow.

"Papa backs me up," she announced breezily, "so you would better come quietly, Evelyn, dear, and not make any fuss about it. You don't know how terrible papa can be when he is crossed."

Evelyn laughed gaily up into the kindly face of the old gentleman. "How do you do, Mr. Mason?" she said, stretching out her hand to him. "If you aren't careful this daughter of yours will be giving you a bad reputation."

"Oh, nobody pays any heed to what she says," he responded lightly; "but for this once she does happen to be right. You are going to make your stay with us while you are in Columbus. Neither of us will listen to any other plan."

"Well, there is no need for you all to be so emphatic about it," returned Evelyn, with a saucy smile. "I assure you, I never had the slightest idea of declining the invitation. In fact, I am only too glad to find such a haven. But let me present Mr. Ellis, who has been more than kind to me on the way out, and who is also held here by the floods."

Blair bowed; and then there was a moment or two of four-cornered conver-

sation.

"Bad state of affairs down the road, I guess," commented the older man to Ellis. "Hope you are not greatly inconvenienced by the tie-up? If you are held in town for any length of time, pray come out and see us. My daughter and I will both be delighted; and she generally manages to have some young folks around to make things interesting."

But the New Yorker excused himself. "For once I find myself superior to fate," he explained, "and even the failure of the entire train service is powerless to stop me. I have my bicycle with me, and I shall consequently push on to Yoctangee awheel. It is only about a hundred miles, I hear, and with any kind of roads that is no run at all."

"No, I suppose not," assented Mr. Mason. "And as for the roads, there is an excellent turnpike all the way. You shouldn't have the least trouble for the first seventy-five miles, anyway. Down

in the Yoctangee valley, where they have been having the rains, you may find a few bridges out and the going a bit uncomfortable, but for the most part, I fancy, you will have a very enjoyable trip."

"At any rate," rejoined Ellis, "the possible lions in my path are not so portentous to me as they would be to a railroad-train. A cyclist can always find some way to get around."

And with that he bowed to Mr. Mason and lifted his cap to the daughter. With Evelyn he shook hands warmly.

"Remember, our acquaintanceship does not end here," he murmured ardently. "I shall certainly look you up as soon as you arrive in Yoctangee."

Nor did the glance which she raised to him above their clasped hands refuse him the permission he craved.

He hurried off, then, to get his wheel out of the baggage-car, place himself outside of a hearty lunch, and make a few other simple preparations for the

journey.

With the aid of a good road-book which he purchased at the news-stand in the depot he figured out that he ought easily to be able to make three-quarters of the distance by sunset that evening. In fact, he was confident that by a little extra exertion he could have completed the entire century; but from what he had heard of the possible condition of the roads, as one approached nearer Yoctangee, prudence forbade so risky an attempt except in the full light of day.

Accordingly, he decided to spend the night at Bainville, a little village some twenty-five or thirty miles removed from

his destination.

When he reached there in good time and found an excellent tavern, with good, clean accommodations, and a smoking-hot country supper awaiting him, he was more than ever satisfied with his discretion; and, the meal having been thoroughly discussed, in high good humor with himself and the world in general he joined a group of local citizens who were lounging on the veranda of the hostelry, their chairs tilted back against the wall.

The chief topic of conversation among them was naturally that of the existing floods; and Ellis remarked curiously on the havoc reported, since the country through which he had passed, so far as he could see, did not appear to be especially invaded.

pecially inundated.

"That's all right around here, stranger, and up the road," granted one of the company, "but you jest wait till you git on t'other side o' the Divide, an' then you'll see enough water to last you fur the rest o' your life. The Yoctangee's been on a turr'ble rampage.

"I seen Si Jones, 'safternoon, over by Wheaton's," he added, turning to the others, "an' he says that if she raises a couple more inches all the levees 'twixt

Yoctangee an' Portsmouth'll go."

"But she ain't goin' to raise no couple o' more inches," scoffed one of his auditors; "that is, unless it'd rain some more to-morrer. She was on a stand at four o'clock this afternoon, an' Clarence, down at the station, told me that the D. N. and Q. was a-goin' to try an' git a train through to-morrer mornin'."

"You don't suppose I will have any trouble in getting over to Yoctangee to-morrow?" queried Ellis, a little anx-

iously.

"Oh, no," he was assured. "The pike runs along on high ground all the

way.'

"He'll have to go about five miles out of his road, jest t'other side o' the Divide, though," put in another informant. "That bridge over Dry Run went out yiste'day. Ef it wasn't fur that"—turning to Ellis—"you c'd have clean sailin' right through into town."

Blair had his road-book, with its map, out on his knee by this time, and this friendly soul, leaning over his shoulder, traced out the course for him with a

horny forefinger.

"This here's the main road, you see," he explained in a running commentary, "an' here's Dry Run a zigzaggin' along jus 'other side o' the Divide, and down here at the foot o' the hill is where the bridge is gone. 'Cordin'ly, you'll have to take this road to the left back here at the forks, an' that'll carry you around in a loop past McConnell's an' Bill Seney's, until you hit the main pike again at the old Ellis Blair place."

"The 'old Ellis Blair place'?" repeated the young man amazedly. "Is there a man by the name of Ellis Blair

in this neighborhood?"

"Well, not jest now there ain't," responded the other dryly. "Ellis Blair's been dead fur goin' on to about three year now. Why?" he asked with bucolic curiosity. "Did you ever know him?"

"No," returned Ellis indifferently, since he saw that his manner had drawn their attention to him. "It was merely that the name struck me as a familiar one. I used to know an Ellis Blair in New York. I don't suppose, however," he added tentatively, "that this was any relation. The man I knew was about my own age."

The farmer shook his head.

"No-o," he said slowly. "Ellis didn't never have no sons, that I ever heern tell of. That is, unless you'd call that daughter, Evvie, of his'n a son. She's spry enough to be a man, I tell you that. Why, she's in business fur herself, makin' ottymobiles over in Noo York. Say, you're from there? Mebbe you might 'a' met her some time?"

But Blair was spared answering the question, for just then an elderly member of the group, who had not hitherto taken part in the conversation, broke in:

"What's that you were sayin', Zach?" he observed. "That Ellis Blair didn't have no sons? What are you talkin' about? Didn't you ever hear that there was a boy by his first wife? He was only a little shaver—'bout two years old, I guess-when his maw died; an' Ellis was so broke up over her death that he let his brother-in-law adopt him. Then, when he got married again an' wanted the child back, he couldn't git him. I've heern folks say that there was an awful row about it, an' that, owin' to some defect in the papers, Ellis might 'a' got him by law; but before he c'd git the matter into the courts the brother-in-law skipped out with the kid, an' they never heard hide nor hair of him again."

"What was this brother-in-law's name?" demanded Ellis sharply.

"Well, now, I don't know that I ever heerd," replied the old man. "He didn't never live in these parts, and——"

"It was not McCutcheon, was it?"

The graybeard pondered several minutes, but was at last obliged to shake his head.

"I couldn't really say," he answered.

"It might have been that, an' then, again, it mightn't. I'll tell you, though" with a happy inspiration—"if you're anxious to find out you'd ought to be able to git at it over at the court-house in Yoctangee. They'd likely be some kind of a record of the adoption on file."

Blair, however, chose to cloak his

eagerness.

"Oh, it's nothing that I am particularly keen on," he replied indifferently. "I simply got interested in the matter from hearing the name of my friend."

A short time after he bade the party good night and started for bed. When he inquired for his key the landlord of the tavern pushed a dog-eared ledger across the counter toward him, and a sputtering pen.

"You ain't signed yit," he pointed

out.

The guest hesitated just a second, and then seizing the pen, dashed across the fly-specked page, "B. Ellis, New York." He had fastened to himself with his own hand the *alias* which had been given him by mistake in the Columbus railroad station.

The quarters allotted to him in the little hotel proved, on closer acquaintance, even better than they had appeared at first inspection. The bed was roomy, clean, and comfortable. After his seventy-five-mile ride he should almost immediately have dropped off to sleep; yet for some reason slumber seemed determined not to visit his eyelids.

In view of all the circumstances, he could not well doubt but that it was his own story he had heard related that evening—that he himself was the infant whom Ellis Blair, in the desolation of his grief, had handed over to the guardianship of an uncle, and that this uncle who had so tenaciously insisted on the bargain was none other than Horace McCutcheon.

But those facts should not have kept him restless and awake. Indeed, he should have been vastly relieved at this explanation of the affair, for it certainly set at rest all those uneasy apprehensions with which he had started out upon his quest.

No, that was not what troubled his mind. It was, rather, that the reflection had suddenly come to him that if this

story were true, then Evelyn Blair must be his own half-sister.

And somehow he did not want to regard her in exactly that relation.

## IV.

## AN APPALLING PROSPECT.

DESPITE his tossings upon his pillow, the pure country air so invigorated Ellis that he was up bright and early in the morning, and ready to start upon his journey. The day dawned clear; but there was a haziness along the horizon, an early sultriness in the atmosphere, which drew forth gloomy forebodings from the landlord.

"I misdoubt me that the rains ain't all over yit," he observed, with a weatherwise squint toward the sky, as he came out on the veranda to speed the parting guest. "You're liable to run into a thunder-storm afore you git down to Yoctangee."

"Oh, well," returned Ellis cheerily, "if I do, I can no doubt find shelter somewhere along the road, and in any case," with an expressive glance at his well-worn outing costume, "I probably sha'n't melt."

He was not so sure of this latter assertion, however, before he had proceeded many miles, although his doubts were raised from a very different cause. In other words, he found it inexpressibly, undeniably, hot. The sun blazed down upon him with an almost tropic intensity.

He did not mind the heat so much, at first, for the earlier stages of his journey lay through a country as level as a floor, and here he made rapid progress; but presently, as he approached the range of hills which bound the northern limits of the valley of the Yoctangee, he ran into a very different proposition. The grade became steadily steeper, his pace less and less swift.

He could see looming up before him, now, the wooded peak of a lofty eminence, which stood out above all its fellows, and which, from the description in his road-book, and also from the remarks let fall at the tavern the night before, he recognized as the formidable "Divide."

The road which he was following led

directly up the slope of this hill and over its top, and his rustic companions of the night before had indulged in considerable banter concerning this climb, freely promising Blair that he would never be able to reach the summit without dismounting from his wheel.

In a spirit of defiance, Ellis now resolved to achieve this feat, and seizing his handle-bars in a firmer grip, he bent his back to the task. Fortunately for him, the road-bed was of a clayey, resilient soil, and not cut up by ruts or fissures, so he managed to surmount the lower ascents without any great degree of trouble.

The long, straight incline of the "Divide" itself, however, was a very different matter. The sultry air seemed to hang over him like a tent; the heat was deadly, enervating.

Yet, none the less, he persisted in his attempt, his muscular legs moving up and down with the precision of pistonrods, his lips pressed tight together, his breath escaping, despite himself, in labored suspirations.

At last he came to the last rise of his journey and the steepest part of the hill. He was bending far over the fork, forcing the machine forward almost by the sheer lift of his shoulders.

Yet, for all his endeavors, slower and more slow moved his wheel, more and more did it display a tendency to wabble in his grasp. He was advancing at hardly more than a snail's pace.

The crest of the hill was but a yard or two away. Could he make it? There was a second of suspense, and then, almost by pure force of will, he pulled himself over the edge, and stepped from the machine, a conqueror.

"Well, I've done it," he panted triumphantly, as he threw himself down on the soft grass by the roadside and mopped his dripping face; "but I'll have to confess that it took all there was in me to do it. If it had been a foot farther I couldn't have made it, not even if my life depended on it."

He stretched himself out luxuriously in the shade and threw his arms above his head. His heart was pumping away like a steam-engine, and his limbs ached from the unaccustomed strain he had put upon them.

From head to foot he was as wet with perspiration as though he had, been plunged in the river.

"Whew! it's hot!" he muttered; and

Even up at that height, where such breeze as was stirring had full sweep, and where the shade lay thick under the big oak and maple trees, the temperature

was something stifling.

Up above him, through the leaves, he could catch glimpses of the sky, and he observed that it had lost the bright blue tint of the early morning, being tinged, instead, with a sort of nondescript vellow.

The outlines of the distant hills, too, it seemed to him, had grown more blurred. In fact, three was a general indistinctness to the entire landscape.

Over in the west there were lazily piling up some heavy banks of cumuli, threateningly shaded on their under sides

with a purplish black.

"I shouldn't wonder if that old landlord were right and we did have some dirty weather before evening," commented Ellis uneasily; "still, I am not going to hurry myself on that account. Now that I have made this corking old climb, I should be a fool not to take full advantage of this glorious view. Besides, it probably won't rain for several hours vet, anyway."

He reckoned without a knowledge of the almost tropical swiftness with which a summer storm gathers in these lati-

tudes.

The view from the summit was indeed a magnificent one. Rising to his feet, Blair made the circumference of the little plateau, and gazed for miles away in

every direction.

To the north lay the level plains through which he had come on his journey; east and west ran the chain of hills which bisects the entire State at this point; and to the south was the valley of the Yoctangee, with its swollen river and flooded streams, the back water standing in lakes and pools over what had a few days before been fertile farm land and pasturage.

Some ten miles away as the crow flies he could make out the spires and chimneys of the little city for which he was bound, and from it he could follow

northward a serpentine line, the singletrack road-bed of the D. N. and O.

Going to the southern brow of the hill, he marked with his eye the course of the turnpike, a ribbon of pale saffron through the green of the corn-fields, and the mirror-like sheets of water. He could see that it was well up above the floods for its entire length, and that he would consequently have no difficulty in reaching the town.

Indeed, the only point which offered any obstacle 'to his advance was the washed-out bridge of which he had been told, and that was just below him, about half-way down the "Divide." The road pitched down toward it in a single steep slope, and then rose slightly to the cross-

He observed curiously that the stream which had wrought such havoc was not very large-not more than twenty-five feet in width at that point; but, as he quickly perceived, it took its rise in the hills directly above, and, consequently, in times of heavy rainfall would be rapidly transformed into a veritable mountain torrent.

On the present occasion it had swept out the bridge clean and clear, leaving the approaches on either side practically intact.

Above this gap the pike forked off into the loop which he had been directed to follow, and he interestedly searched with his eye its curving course to find its junction with the main road again, and thus locate the house which had been occupied by his namesake—the house, perhaps, in which he himself had been born.

In order to assist his vision, he got his field-glasses out of the traveling-case strapped on his bicycle and focused them on the prospect before him. Through them he could readily make out the old stone dwelling, set well back from the road and embowered in a grove of walnut-trees.

There was about it an air of sturdy individuality—a sort of uncompromising independence—which pleased Ellis immensely.

"It is just the sort of place that one would imagine for the home of Evelyn Blair," he commented reflectively.

He was just about to complete the sur-

vey and put away his glasses, when the peculiar actions of a group of men along the railroad track caught his attention.

They were in a little hollow down in the valley where the line of the D. N. and Q. curved in close to the main pike, and a good four miles away from him, but the binoculars brought them so well within the field of his vision that he could discern their every movement as well as if they had been distant not a hundred feet.

He had noted them once or twice before during the progress of his inspection, but, deeming them merely section hands at their nooning, or a party of hoboes loafing their idle hours away, had paid little heed to their proceeding.

They had been seated under a tree near the railroad track, engaged in a game of cards. Now, however, they abruptly ceased their game, and rising to their feet, began tying black masks across one another's faces.

At the same time, they busied themselves in inspecting carefully the workings of the revolvers and Winchesters with which the watcher on the hilltop could now see that they were armed.

What could it mean? When they had first risen to their feet Blair had supposed that they were simply apprehensive on account of the rising storm, which was now plainly rolling up from the southwest; but the masks and the firearms speedily disabused his mind on that score.

A moment before, the threatening black clouds had caused him to think of seeking shelter for himself; but he forgot all about that in his astonishment at this new development.

Leveling his glasses upon the men down in the valley, he gazed wonderingly, while they, their preparations completed, filed down to the track, and with a couple of skids began to loosen a rail from the ties.

Then there flashed upon his mind the recollection of a remark he had heard dropped at the tavern the night before: "Clarence down at the station says that the D. N. and Q. is goin' to try an' git a train through to-morrer mornin'."

As if to give confirmation to his thought, there broke upon his ear at that moment a sound, faint and far away, but unmistakable in its character. It was the shrill whistle of an approaching train.

"Those men are train-wreckers!"

gasped Ellis, in horror.

The sky above had by this time become overcast with a dull, leaden gray, and a great black cloud, fringed along its edges with forked lightnings, was sweeping rapidly up from the west. The air had grown absolutely motionless with the calm that precedes a storm.

Through that intense, unnatural stillness there was borne to him plainly the distant rumble of car-wheels on an iron

track.

Swiftly he faced about and pointed his glasses in the direction from which the sound came. Away off to the north, but sweeping rapidly down toward Yoctangee, he could make out the smoke of a locomotive and the serpent-like progress of the train.

It was the D. N. and Q. passenger—the first train to be sent out over the line since the destruction of the bridge—and, judging from its rate of speed, it must pass below him inside of the next ten minutes.

He turned again to the black-masked men. They had finished their work of tearing up the track, and were now ranged on either bank waiting for the fruition of their devilish plan.

Their purpose was only too evident to Blair. They intended to wreck and rob the approaching cars, reasoning, no doubt, that in the present flooded condition of the country they could escape without much danger of pursuit.

That they meant business there could be no question. The care and promptitude they had displayed in all their preparations showed that their scheme had been well considered and that they proposed to carry their grim undertaking through to success.

In appalled dismay, Blair nervously clenched and unclenched his hands and gnawed at his mustache.

Was there no way in which he could warn the unsuspecting train of its impending peril? His voice, of course, could never carry to the engineer. But a signal of some kind?

Yet, even as the suggestion came to him he realized the utter futility of it. How much time had he to rig up a signal, or, even if he had, what assurance had he that the trainmen would heed it, displayed at that height, or, indeed, ever notice it at all?

No; a signal, to accomplish anything, would have to be fluttered right beside the track. The road lay straight before him. In three minutes he could coast down that steep slope upon his wheel and be beside the track.

But, alas! between him and the bottom of the hill yawned the open chasm left by the washing out of the Dry Run bridge

No; there was nothing that he could do. All that was left for him was to sit up here and watch the inevitable ca-

tastrophe.

And then, with a pang of acute consternation, a new thought shot into his mind. In all probability Evelyn Blair was a passenger upon that doomed train!

For just one second his heart stood still in an awfulness of horror. The next, he sprang impulsively forward and vaulted into the saddle of his bicycle!

V.

## BY THE AIR ROUTE.

In that moment of agonized helplessness there had suddenly come to Ellis Blair, like an inspiration, the memory of a feat he had seen performed in the circus only a few weeks before, in New York.

Down a steep incline, extending from the very top of the Madison Square Garden, had sped a man astride a flying wheel. Almost before one had time to think, he reached the bottom, then dashed up a little slant, and, with the impetus acquired sailed out into the air like a bird, leaping an open chasm forty feet in width, to alight safe upon the other side.

It was a thrilling and hazardous performance, one which uniformly held a vast audience spellbound in breath-catching suspense; but the very fact that it had been done, and done, too, not by a professional gymnast, but by a young daredevil of an amateur, proved to Ellis that any man with sufficient nerve to attempt it and enough gumption to control his bicycle en route could achieve the same resulte

Here, on the southern slope of the "Divide," as Blair's eye had already remarked, the natural conditions were almost perfect for the test. There was, first, the long, straight slant from the summit, then the little upward rise, and finally the yawning gap, where the bridge across Dry Run had been lifted from its moorings by the sudden rush of waters.

All these considerations take time in the telling, but as a matter of fact they flashed through the young man's mind instantaneously. Hardly had the recollection of the circus act presented itself to him before he had made his decision and was off.

If Evelyn Blair was aboard that train, her peril was imminent. A swift mental picture of a railroad wreck, with all its attendant horrors, whirled before the man's eyes. He could not afford to hesitate

Just long enough to straighten out his wheel and take his firmest grip upon the handle-bars he stopped; a second later

he was flying down the hillside.

Swiftly and more swiftly revolved the wheels. In fact, the speed was so great that the rider did not have time to think. All his impressions were jumbled into a confused whirl, except for the one paramount idea that, whatever else occurred, he must not let that front wheel of his swerve by even so much as a hair-breadth.

Ellis had tobogganed, he had coasted, he had shot the chutes; but never had he dreamed of such velocity of motion as that which he now attained. The way he went down that hill was like nothing so much as the swoop of a swallow.

Before he had traversed a dozen rods his cap was blown from his head, his hair streamed out behind him, the flying particles of dust in the air stung his skin like needles. The wheel seemed to be no longer turning or the tires touching the ground. His sensation was simply one of tearing through space.

So fast, indeed, was he moving, that when he reached the bottom of the incline and shot up the little opposite slope to the crossing he actually did not realize that he was not still descending.

Then, for one brief glimpse, he caught the flash of water underneath him, a momentary vision of the rocky bed of a stream, and knew that he was soaring through the empty air.

The next instant he felt the jolt as his bicycle landed on the farther bank and swept on in its triumphant career.

He had done it—had made the jump successfully; but still he had no time for exultation. His speed was still something terrific, and he feared to clamp on the brake except in the most gradual fashion.

The ground here, however, was level for quite a little stretch, and little by little he managed to wear down the whirlwind impetus he had acquired and gain some control over his runaway steed.

For the first time since he had started, he ventured to raise his head and take a glance about him. Hitherto the roar of the wind in his ears had been so strong as to drown all other noises; but now, with his slackening gait, the rumble and rattle of the approaching train became plainly perceptible to him.

He threw a hasty look back over his shoulder and saw the smoke of the locomotive just rounding a curve at the foot of the western shoulder of the "Di-

vide."

The train was not a mile away from him and he had to get across a stretch of plowed field to reach a point along the track where he could signal. The distance between the pike and the railroad, he found, was considerably greater than it had appeared to him from the hilltop.

He glanced ahead with quick apprehension. Was all his daring risk, then, to be for naught? Was he to fail in his

errand, after all?

No; thank Heaven! fortune still favored him. Just ahead stood an open gate, and from it ran a lane across the field, affording access to the track for both himself and his wheel.

It was a sharp turn in, at that gate, at the pace he was going; but he made it. Through the opening he dashed, and on down the lane, pedaling with all his might, his goal now plainly in sight.

The first gust of the coming storm

The first gust of the coming storm met him as he made the turn and faced toward the west. With a spatter of raindrops and an exulting blast of the wind, it strove to drive him back.

For a moment he was staggered by its force; but he resolutely braced himself and pushed on right in the very teeth of the gale.

He heard a cry to his left, and glancing in that direction, saw the trainwreckers running toward him. They had evidently penetrated his purpose, and were now trying to retard him from accomplishing it.

The next message from them would no doubt come in the shape of a sharp

crack from a rifle.

But his other eye could see the engine, with its string of coaches, speeding on to destruction; so he only crouched lower in his saddle and pedaled away harder than ever.

Another blast from the approaching storm met him, fiercer than before. It whirled a cloud of dust up into his face, choking and blinding him for the moment. The rain beat down in a pelting flood.

The roar of the oncoming train was now so close that he could hear above it the clank-clank of the driving-wheels as they bit upon the rail, and also, closer upon his left, he could catch the cries of the train-wreckers hastening to thwart him.

Was everything conspiring toward his defeat?

Only one hundred feet farther, now. He reached up with one hand and tore loose a red bandanna handkerchief which he wore about his neck, and which he intended to use as a signal-flag.

The train was fairly upon him; but he was there!

The fluttering kerchief in his hand, he hurled himself from his wheel, and with a shout of triumph leaped up the embankment.

And then the world suddenly resolved itself into a chaos of swirling flame; his ears were deafened by a crashing detonation, as though Heaven itself had collapsed. He staggered backward, threw his arms up before his face, and—knew no more!

## VI.

#### A PRISONER OF FATE.

WHEN Blair recovered consciousness he found himself in a darkened room, and he realized in a vague, uncertain way

that somebody was sitting beside him ply-

Through a certain intangible but none the less definite perception he decided that this person was a woman.

It never occurred to him to make sure upon this point, for he felt a strange disinclination to move in the slightest degree. It was so much easier to lie still and to take no trouble of any kind—not even the trouble to think.

Nevertheless, his thoughts, working slowly and disconnectedly though they did, finally forced home upon him the conclusion that he must have been ill, and he meditated perplexedly upon this astounding fact for quite a little time.

In fact, it seemed rather humorous to him than otherwise; he had never been ill a day in his life, and had boasted so often of his unfailing good health that this was in a way somewhat of a joke upon him.

Why he had been sick or how long, or where he now was, he never stopped to consider. He was absolutely devoid of

Gradually his sluggish faculties becoming more aroused he opened his eyes languidly, and saw stretched above him the canopy of an old-fashioned fourposter bed. This at last set him to speculating mildly upon his surroundings.

He did not recognize that bed as a part of the furniture in his own room. Where, then, was he, and how had he come there?

He cudgeled his brain in a confused fashion over these questions for several moments, but utterly failed to reach any satisfactory conclusion, until at last, with the slow awakening of memory, he recalled that mad dash of his down the "Divide," with its sensational leap across the gaping channel of Dry Run—that anxious race of his against time to warn the imperiled train.

Ah! how the picture came back to him now! .That plowed field, with its narrow lane running from the pike to the railroad track; the engine and train speeding toward him on the right, the masked desperadoes on his left hastening forward to the attack, himself bent low upon his wheel, flogging his tired sinews to still greater exertion.

The weird gloom of the approaching storm lay over all the landscape; above was the ebon sky, with its dark masses of whirling clouds; ahead came an advancing gray wall of pelting rain, cutting off the distant hills as with a veil.

And then had blazed out that sudden fierce glare of crackling, rose-colored flame; there had sounded that tremendous, crashing roar, when, as it seemed to him, the whole universe had jumbled together in one monster cataclysm.

And after that?

Ha! He was beginning now to reason from cause to effect. His recollections failed abruptly at that point. Consequently, from that moment to this he must have been insensible—dead to all that went on around him.

And the cause? The cause was beyond question that thunderous outbreak of fire and fury which had met him as he ran forward to signal the train.

Yet, what could it have been? A terrific explosion of some kind? Or, possibly, the effect of a bullet crashing into his brain from the revolver of one of the robbers?

Neither theory seemed to fit the

He suddenly bethought him of the breaking storm. Ah! that was more like it! A stroke of lightning.

He wondered dully if he had been injured permanently in any way by the shock; but as he felt no pain in any part of his body, only an overwhelming inclination to lie still and not exert himself, he readily concluded that fears on this score were groundless.

A more engrossing speculation with him was as to the fate of the train which he had striven so hard to save. Had it, like himself, been stopped by the thunderbolt, or had it dashed heedlessly on to destruction?

Reflection, however, also reassured him on this point. He himself had evidently been picked up and cared for by some one. It was unlikely that the trainwreckers would have delayed their flight to play the good Samaritan to one who had done his best to thwart them.

And since there was no one else about, it was but reasonable to suppose that succor had come to him from those aboard

the rescued train. Yes; that was undoubtedly the case. The train people, in return for what he had done, had carried him here, and had seen to it that he received every attention.

Comforted by these conclusions, and tired out, moreover, by the amount of thinking he had done, he ceased further cogitation for the present and dozed off

quietly to sleep.

A few minutes later a man entered the room with the silent step of a physician and questioned the woman sitting at Blair's bedside.

"How does he seem by now?" he asked.

She was a rather elderly lady, with gray hair arranged in soft puffs above her smooth forehead, and with a gentle, kindly face.

"Just about the same," she answered.
"He lies there absolutely inert, his breathing the only indication that he is alive. There has not been the slightest change at any time since he was first

brought in."

"Nor will there be," returned the other. He spoke with the definite assurance of a young practitioner. "He will simply last as long as that powerful vitality of his can hold him up. Then he will go out like a snuffed candle. The incredible thing about it is that he should have lived as long as he has. Three full days now, is it not?"

"Yes, poor soul." She laid her hand compassionately on the sick man's brow.

"Have you been able to find any of his friends or relatives yet, so that they can be notified?"

"No. The only clue to his identity, as you know, is that signature of his upon the register of the tavern at Bainville. I telegraphed yesterday to the authorities of New York, and also to the newspapers, but they seem unable to locate any one named B. Ellis who might be in this part of the country."

The woman sighed and once more

murmured, "Poor soul!"

The doctor leaned across the bed to make a perfunctory examination of his patient's condition. He manifestly deemed it little worth his while to waste any especial effort upon one who was practically already beyond the reach of his skill.

"A total and complete paralysis," he muttered to himself, gazing down upon the silent, immobile features. "Every organ in his body is affected. How on earth such an absolute corpse can still maintain even the semblance of life passes my comprehension."

Just at that moment Blair chanced to awake from his nap, and languidly

opened his eyes.

The doctor started back in amazement.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated. "The fellow's eyes are open. Get me a light, quick—a candle," waving his hand in a gesture of brusk command toward the woman.

She hastened off to do his bidding. The physician bent down and scanned with interested professional intentness

the face of his patient.

But if his surprise was great at the development he had encountered, it was no greater, although from a different cause, than that which suddenly struck the mind of the man he was examining. Blair could see the doctor's lips moving in speech; but, to his astonishment, not a word that was uttered could he hear.

He realized now that an intense stillness had surrounded him ever since he had wakened from his condition of coma. In the quiet prevailing in his chamber he should at least have caught the swish of the woman's fan as she moved it to and fro, or perhaps the buzzing of a fly against the window-pane. Was it, then, that the crashing peal of thunder had stricken him stone-deaf?

At the supposition, he instinctively started to rise in bed, but his limbs refused to lift him. He tried again, struggled, strove with might and main. Not a muscle moved in obedience to his will.

Was he, then, in addition to being deaf, powerless, shorn of his strength? He endeavored to speak—to demand of the doctor above him what was the reason of this awful lethargy. His voice refused to respond to his bidding; not a sound could he emit.

He felt just as a person does in one of those horrible nightmares when, to all seeming perfectly wide awake, one is unable to stir hand or foot, but lies pertectly impotent, chained with fetters of steel. He made one more desperate effort to burst the intangible bonds which held him. It was of no use. He could no more move himself than he could fly. He could only lie there, a powerless human log, deprived of all his faculties.

No; one of his senses was left. He

could still see.

As the real state of his appalling situation broke upon his mind his soul recoiled from the prospect with shuddering horror. Was this all, then, that the future offered him—to drag out the weary years in a state of living death? Better that his life had been extinguished once and for all with the falling of the stroke.

So intense was the awful, shuddering mental anguish which overwhelmed him that he almost swooned.

Then his cool reason came to his aid, and with her assurance hope rose once

more to give him courage.

Since he had regained one sense, he asked himself, was it not fair to suppose that in time all of them would come back? Indeed, with his health and constitution, might he not hope eventually to recover all of his faculties?

The shock he had withstood had evidently been a tremendous one; but since he had already progressed so favorably, what need was there to give way to de-

spair?

Yet, for all his optimism, he eagerly searched the face of the physician above him in an endeavor to read there the answer to the anxious questions which were surging in his brain.

The lady had by this time returned with the candle, and the doctor, taking it in his hand, passed it rapidly once or

twice in front of Blair's eyes.

"Yes; he can see," he exclaimed, turning to the woman with quick confirmation. "More than that, I believe that the fellow is absolutely conscious."

Bending again over the patient, he said to him slowly and distinctly: "Can you understand what I am saying to

you?"

There was no answer. Indeed, there could be none. Blair, although he could neither hear nor talk, saw that the other's lips were moving, and grasped the purpose of his action. He tried, oh, so determinedly, to give some answering

sign, even if it were only a motion of the head; but his attempt was futile.

He could only gaze up at the other with the mute, imploring appeal of his

eves.

The physician, disappointed at the result of his test, was about to turn away, but he caught the plea of that supplicating glance and hesitated. A glimmer of the truth came to him.

With a sudden inspiration, he drew a pencil from his pocket and wrote large across the face of a prescription-blank: "Can you read this message? If so, close your eyes twice and then open them again."

This he held before the sick man's vision and waited anxiously for his

answer.

Almost immediately his instructions were complied with. Blair quickly lowered his eyelids twice. Then he reopened them with a flash of triumph in his glance.

The doctor straightened to his feet

with a little cry of exultation.

"What is it?" asked the old lady, nervously laying her hand upon his arm. "Is he worse?"

"Worse? No, indeed. I am going to cure him, now that I have found a medium of communication!"

## VII.

## A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE young physician was no longer perfunctory or careless in his manner toward his patient. Here was a case which might well arouse all his interest, all his ambition, and he threw himself into it heart and soul.

Over Blair's anatomy he prodded and punched and nudged. He tested in the most elaborate fashion all the man's deadened senses, to see if he coud not detect somewhere a faint, lingering spark

of sentient feeling.

And even when he failed, even when not a single response rewarded all his efforts, he determined only the more firmly that he would still conquer—would yet restore the spirit of life and vigor to this inanimate flesh.

In Blair's enfeebled condition, the thorough examination naturally wore him out, and when it was completed he was glad enough to accede to the doctor's orders that he should go at once to sleep without undergoing any further excitement.

"Don't let yourself get bothered about anything for the present," wrote this new friend in his final message. "To-morrow we will answer all the questions you may desire to ask; but for the present you will just have to let things slide. And above all, don't go to worrying about your condition. I am going to pull you through, all right."

Ellis looked his gratitude for this consoling message, batted his eyes twice in token of his acquiescence to its mandates, and then dropped off into a prolonged

and restful slumber.

During the night he was aroused once by the sweet-faced old lady in order to take his medicine; but, resolutely obedient to the doctor's instructions, he immediately closed his eyes again, and soon was once more locked fast in a quiet, dreamless sleep.

When he at length returned to a consciousness of mundane things the broad daylight was streaming in at the windows. The morning was far advanced, and the doctor had already come to visit

him.

The young man could detect no apparent change in himself from the previous day. He was still clamped fast in the viselike grip of his paralysis, unable to feel or to move, deaf, dumb, and bereft of taste and smell; but for all that, he was by no means downcast in his spirits.

The deft, assured manner of the doctor, and above all, the satisfaction which appeared on his face as the examination proceeded, gave Blair hope and courage

for the future.

The same methods of communication were employed between them as on the previous afternoon, the physician making his inquiries as to the other's feelings and symptoms by means of written questions; and Ellis looked forward, when this business of testing his physical condition should have been completed, to a little chat in which he hoped to gain some information on various matters which were puzzling him.

But again he was destined to be dis-

appointed.

The doctor's concluding message was that he had undergone sufficient agitation for the time being and that he would have to wait for other topics until that afternoon, in the meantime endeavoring to keep himself as composed as possible.

"You are getting along splendidly," the writing ended, "and you must help along your recovery as much as possible by being docile and obedient to my orders. I shall be very busy myself to-day, but Mrs. Collier is preparing a sort of letter which will tell you everything you want to know, and which will be shown to you when she has finished it."

Accordingly, Blair had to possess his soul in such patience as he might.

Along about three o'clock in the afternoon, then, the old lady came to his bedside with the promised manuscript, and held it up, sheet by sheet, to him for

inspection.

"To-day is the ninth day of August," began the narrative. "You were brought here on the afternoon of the fifth, suffering from the effects of a terrific stroke of lightning. We summoned Dr. Morris at once, and after an examination he pronounced you fatally injured, claiming that it was impossible for you ever to arouse from the unconscious condition in which you lay. He said that you were affected with a total paraylsis.

"Nevertheless, under his instructions, we never ceased for a moment our efforts to revive you, with the results which you know. Dr. Morris now believes that with rest and proper care there is no reason why you should not in time regain all your functions and, despite the terrible shock you have endured, be eventually restored to as good health as you enjoyed originally.

"I have dealt at length with these matters in order to allay your natural apprehensions, and also because I knew your physical state would be the subject of most vital interest to you at the pres-

ent time.

"To continue," went on the writing, "we learned your name, and wired to the authorities at your home in an endeavor to communicate with your friends or relatives, but, so far, have received no reply.

"If there is any person you would like to have notified, please signify the fact

to me by closing your eves twice, and we will try to devise some method of

finding out who it is."

She held the paper aside for a moment, in order to search his face for the sign; but he held his eyelids resolutely open. There was really no one just now whom he cared to have informed of his

predicament.

He was supposed to be away on his vacation, so his absence from his desk would cause no comment. But if it should become generally known how ill he was, especially with a disease affecting the brain, he was well aware that the results upon the concerns under his charge might be very disastrous.

The old lady, understanding nothing of this, merely recognized that this piece of flotsam cast upon her shores was apparently without human ties. She sighed commiseratingly, and allowed him to re-

sume his reading.

Blair noticed with some surprise that there was only a page more of it, and he wondered at this, for he knew that in that space she could not well touch upon the fate of the railroad train he had tried to warn, nor be able to tell him what had befallen the train-wreckers.

She might naturally have supposed that he would be interested in these things, he said to himself. Why, then, was she so strangely silent about them? He longed to question her-to ask for

some further particulars.

Still, he reflected, the matter had probably turned out all right. Had it been otherwise, and had the train plunged ahead into a catastrophe, she would almost certainly have made some mention of it. It would have been a matter of too great and too recent interest in this little community to be ignored.

So he turned his eyes once more to the sheet of paper she held up before him and read: "You are now my guest, and I trust you will feel yourself welcome here as long as you may remain. My name is Mrs. Mary Collier, and I am a widow without many interests in life, so your coming has been a godsend to us, in a way. This house is called the old Ellis Blair place, and is situated only a short distance from the foot of the 'Divide,' and about eight miles away from Yoctangee."

The communication ended here, and when she thought he had had sufficient time to read the concluding page she started to lay it away with the others; but she observed such a perplexed, questioning light in his eyes that, thinking he had not thoroughly mastered it, she held it up to him once more.

He was evidently deeply interested. staring fixedly at the written words with his brow puckered into a thoughtful

frown.

She still held the sheet up to his inspection, but he turned his gaze away from the paper and looked into her face with a wistful, insistent inquiry. There was manifestly something he wished to say to her, some message that he would give worlds to have the power of expressing; but what it was she found herself unable to determine.

She read the last sheet of her letter over again in an attempt to try to fathom his wishes, but it told her nothing.

"I cannot tell what he is driving at." she muttered, "unless it is that he is trying to thank me for the little I have been able to do for him."

But she was mistaken. It was not gratitude that Blair was so strenuously trying to convey to her, but a question

directly concerning himself.

For the hand which had penned the final word, "Yoctangee," upon her manuscript was the same which had written it on that letter which he had found wedged in behind the drawer of Horace McCutcheon's old-fashioned bureau, and which had sent him flying off on this wild-goose chase of his to the West.

## VIII.

## A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.

IT was the thirteenth day of August, and along about eleven o'clock in the morning the telephone in the office of the Great Atlantic Importing and Exporting Company rang a noisy summons, and inquiry was made for Mr. Blair.

"Mr. Blair is not in just at present,"

answered the boy in the box.

"Well, then, somebody else who is in authority," said the impatient, insistent voice at the other end of the wire; and the boy, consequently, made connection with the desk of Mr. Fearing, the chief clerk.

Now, Fearing was an old fixture, who had remained over from the McCutcheon régime; and although he was careful, accurate, and faithful to the last degree in the performance of his duties, he was not just the person to handle a difficult situation with tact and diplomacy.

And, alas! the present situation was one requiring a diplomat; for at the other end of that 'phone was Percy Hastings, one of the shrewdest and keenest newspaper reporters in New York, and he was now bent on tracing down a story of which he had caught a hint from the gossiping remarks of one of the clerks in Blair's concern.

He now asked suavely for Mr. Blair, representing himself as a person who had some important business to transact with the head of the house.

Fearing responded in worried fashion that Mr. Blair was absent on his vacation and asked if some one else in the establishment would not do as well.

The reporter, still enacting the hurried man of affairs, replied tersely that some one else would not do and seemed indignant that Blair had not returned at the end of ten days, averring that such had been a promise made by the secretary to himself.

He seemed, moreover, considerably puzzled at this dereliction, remarking, en passant, that Blair had always been scrupulously exact in keeping his appointments.

The matter between them was so extremely important, however, that it must certainly have slipped Blair's memory, else he himself would undoubtedly have heard from him. Perhaps Mr. Fearing could give him an address where a message might be sent to Mr. Blair?

No? Well, then, the name of the last place from which they had received news of their chief? The message could no doubt be forwarded.

He, was so persistent, and withal so wily in his methods of attack, that poor old Fearing was completely taken in, and fmally confessed that the present whereabouts of Blair was a complete enigma to all his associates, and that they were in the greatest kind of a stew over his unexplained absence.

This was all that Percy Hastings wanted. He thanked Fearing politely, expressed his concern over the strange situation, hoped that everything would turn out all right in the end, and rang off the telephone.

A few moments later, but now in propria persona, he sauntered into the office of the Great Atlantic Company.

Fortified with the intelligence he had already extracted from Fearing, he made short work of the futile attempt at secrecy and reserve which the clerks endeavored to maintain. He turned them inside out with a searching inquisition, and forced them to tell him everything they knew.

He learned, accordingly, that Mr. Blair had left New York the first of the month, in accordance with his annual custom, for a bicycle trip up through New England; that nothing had been heard from him since he started, but that no especial uneasiness had been occasioned until the end of the tenth day, when, in direct opposition to the fixed routine of his habits, he had failed either to return or to send word when he might be expected; that this uneasiness had now developed into anxiety and alarm; that urgent inquiry at points along his intended route had failed to elicit the slightest information concerning him; that it was now practically certain that he had not followed at all the course he had laid out, but had gone in some other direction; and, finally, that in view of the man's well-known customs the whole affair was so inexplicable and mystifying that all who knew him were completely at sea.

Here was a first-page story with a vengeance, and Percy Hastings did not fail to take advantage of it. In the next edition of the yellow sheet for which he labored the tale was set forth with sensational embellishments and cunningly worded speculations calculated to rouse the interest of the reader, and to forever damn the business reputation of its unfortunate subject.

Thus launched, the Ellis Blair disappearance speedily became a cause célèbre. It happened to be a dull season, and the other newspapers followed suit, hopping upon the case with the avidity of a hungry sparrow after a worm.

Politics were dead, sporting events in a rather languishing state, and public interest was yearning for something on which to whet its teeth. Consequently, the great mass of newspaper readers, with their love of anything savoring of mystery, seized upon the topic, and followed with eager concern the developments recorded by the journalists from day to day.

Ellis Blair and his possible whereabouts was a subject for ardent discussion among thousands of people who had never heard his name before. It was disputed over in clubs, cafés, and restaurants; in offices and boudoirs, and by merchants and newsboys with equal

and unabated zest.

There were other results, too, and of a different nature. Ellis had business rivals who had watched his phenomenal rise with jealous scrutiny. These sought to give a sinister cast to his strange absence, and set afloat sly rumors and innuendoes, which were presently reflected in the tone of the newspaper comments.

All of these things had a marked effect, and by them the prestige of the Great Atlantic Company was becoming rapidly impaired. Its stockholders were panic-stricken, its directors in despair.

Blair had so persistently kept all the manifold interests of the concern to himself, the whole enterprise was so dominated by his personality, that his sudden withdrawal was like the removal of the corner-stone from a lofty tower. The whole structure was so weakened and debilitated that the slightest adverse wind might send it crashing down in collapse. No one was in a position to take firm hold, or to give the lie to the rumors so industriously circulated.

The slow days dragged on, and the stories affecting the company's stability became steadily more open and virulent. Never was seen a case where an apparently sound and solvent concern so rapidly disintegrated by reason of the defection

of its master-spirit.

By the 1st of September the harassed directorate agreed that drastic measures would have to be resorted to, and therefore decided to hold a meeting on the 15th of the month to decide whether it would not be wise to close up the institution and wind up its affairs.

The delay of fifteen days was necessary in order that an expert examination might be made of Blair's books; for by this time there were few who did not believe that the secretary had skipped out and had taken along with him a large quantity of the company's funds.

True, his well-known exemplary habits all tended to disprove any such hypothesis; but his enemies had been busy, and the public is always prone to give credence to the worst that can be said

of any one.

Moreover, as it had unfortunately happened, Ellis had a short time before his departure sent a considerable sum of money to a financial agency in one of the Central American republics with which the United States has no extradition treaty, and for purposes of convenience had had the remittance made payable to his personal order.

This fact was uncovered by the experts only a few days after they began their task, and being unexplained, was naturally taken as complete confirmation

of rascality on his part.

But the strange feature of the whole affair was that amid all this hubbub and investigation, this winnowing out of all sorts of suggestions and theories, this following up of hundreds of baseless clues, no one for a moment thought of connecting his absence with the numerous inquiries which had been sent on from Yoctangee seeking information concerning the friends and relatives of one B. Ellis, who had been struck by lightning.

#### IX.

## THE MAN IN THE PICTURE.

EVELYN BLAIR had not been on the train which Ellis had so nearly lost his life in trying to save. As a matter of fact, she was spared the necessity of going down to Yoctangee by accidentally encountering on the streets of Columbus the very man she had traveled West to interview.

They, like herself, were held at the capital by stress of the floods, and as she had a thorough familiarity with the location of the site under discussion, their mutual business was satisfactorily transacted.

Thus it happened that, instead of ta-

king the D. N. and Q. on the morning after she left Blair, she retraced her footsteps to New York.

It is not to be denied, despite the fact no longer imperative for her to visit Yoctangee, that it was only by the exercise of a firm will that she-restrained herself from doing so; and this not by reason of any overweening desire to see her old friends as she endeavored to persuade herself, but rather to meet once more a very recent acquaintance, for-let it be whispered gently-Evelyn was really as favorably impressed with Ellis as he was with her.

Still, a woman likes to be sought; and although Miss Blair was above many of the foibles of her sex, she was just feminine enough to tell herself that if her comrade of the journey wished to see anything more of her he would have to take the trouble to look her up in New York. She certainly-with a toss of her pretty head-did not intend to chase all around the country after him.

He had told her that he was on a vacation trip of ten days, so she did not expect him for some little time after her return; but when the fortnight had elapsed it was noticeable that her daily appearances at the office were marked by especial care and pains with her toilet. Her hair was always smooth and unruffled, her ribbons of the daintiest and freshest.

Her associates also observed, during this period, an unwonted spirit of abstraction on her part. She was not thoroughly and completely taken up with business, as before, but often fell into fits of pensive musing at her desk, and would start and flush whenever an unaccustomed step sounded at the door.

Still, as the days wore on and there came no word and no visit from Ellis, the unacknowledged hope which she had been cherishing grew fainter and fainter.

It had only been a passing flirtation with him, she told herself angrily; an acquaintanceship to be forgotten as quickly as it was made. Well, why should she think any more about it? If he chose to act in such cavalier fashion, she could survive, no doubt. Probably she was well rid of him.

Nevertheless, she grew strangely

peevish and petulant, finding fault where : none existed, and then trying to make up for her bad temper by injudicious leniency. She was variable, capricious. that the exigencies of business made it moody; and she ascribed it to the hot weather.

> One evening in September she received a call from Percy Hastings, the reporter. She had known him ever since she had been in New York, and although she did not particularly care for him, vet, since they were in the same set, she was on a friendly footing with him.

> For a time they sat and chatted; but as conversation languished, Hastings proposed that they go to a vaudeville show. Restless, out of sorts with herself, craving diversion, the girl readily consented, and accordingly they

> Percy was full of the great "beat" he had scored in the Blair disappearance case and its more recent developments. All the way to the theater he would talk of nothing else, and although Evelyn felt little interest in the matter, and for the most part paid little heed to his observations upon it, she could not fail to catch an occasional remark.

> "Well, in four days more the whole thing will come to a head," he finally "Then the directors of the company will meet to hear the report of the experts, and I suppose will wind the concern up. The next thing, of course, will be a warrant for Blair, and an effort to get him to disgorge his plunder."

> "I don't see why you should say that," retorted Evelyn warmly, miffed by the cock-sureness of Hastings's manner. "All you newspaper men speak of this Mr. Blair as though he were already a convicted criminal. Why don't you wait until the examination of his books is completed?"

> "Oh, I guess there's no doubt of his crookedness," returned Hastings airily. "Men don't disappear that way unless they have a very good reason for it. But what has made you such a vehement champion of his?" he added. "Simply because he is your namesake?"

Now, Evelyn, as stated, really cared not a whit one way or the other about the case, but Hastings's attitude gave her an opportunity to vent her spleen at the world in general, and she took advan-. tage of it. They argued the matter with heat all the rest of the way down-town, and only allowed their discussion to subside when they had finally taken their

seats in the playhouse.

The performance was one of the familiar vaudeville type—little dramatic skits sandwiched in between jugglers, gymnasts, singers, and monologists. It did not especially amuse Evelyn, and when it had progressed to the final number—the moving pictures—she signified to her escort that she was ready to leave.

"Oh, let us wait a few minutes longer," urged Hastings. "They are going to put on something new, to-night, which

they claim is well worth seeing.

It seems that a train-wrecking scene had been arranged out West somewhere. Some bold bandits, hired at one-fifty a day, were to ditch a bone-yard engine and some dilapidated cars upon a piece of track temporarily abandoned by the floods. Just as everything was in readiness, however, a bicyclist on the summit of a near-by hill observed the dastardly preparations, and imagining it all to be in dead earnest, dashed to the rescue.

"The vitascope man happened to see him just as he cast off, and realizing that his act would be worth more than the other, turned his instrument in that di-

rection.

"The fellow came down the hill like a streak of light, jumped a bridgeless stream, and would no doubt have tackled the pseudo-desperadoes, but a stroke of lightning cut short his adventure. He is now——"

But the further remarks of the reporter were cut short by the sudden darkening of the house and the flashing out of

the pictures.

A number of the usual sort of representations were first thrown upon the screen—cattle drinking at a pool of water, a troop of cavalry, comic scenes, weird transformations—and then was announced: "The Ride to Save the Train."

The light wavered for a moment, steadied itself, and to Evelyn's astonishment she was looking upon the familiar scenes of her childhood—the flooded valley of the Yoctangee, with the "Divide" standing out grim and massive in the background.

Then, with a quick flash of the picture, she saw the top of that eminence, and, there was—she gave a gasp of amazement—there was none other than the man she had traveled with to Columbus.

All her faculties seemed concentrated now in the one sense of sight. Oblivious to all about her, she leaned forward in her seat, her gloved hands nervously clasping and unclasping, her breath coming short and fast.

She saw him standing there, gazing fixedly down into the valley; saw his momentary hesitation and perplexity, the swift decision that he made; saw him mount his wheel, push off; saw that thrilling whirlwind charge of his down the valley and across the stream.

The whole scene was pictured for her in the swift-moving panorama upon the screen—the turn at the gate, the hurried dash across the fields, the confused flash and glare when the lightning struck, then the hero lying prostrate and unconscious on the ground beside his bent and twisted bicycle.

The vision ended and the lights flared up all over the house. The show was

over.

"What was the name of the man who did that?" demanded Evelyn breath-lessly of her companion.

"Ellis," he responded. "B. Ellis, of New York. We had an inquiry about him at the time it happened, but we were

never able to locate him here.'
"And where is he now?"

"Out where it happened, I suppose, unless he is dead by this time. Our reports in August were that he was totally paralyzed by the shock. Great picture, though, isn't it?"

She assented absently. She was wondering how soon she could catch a train to Yoctangee; for her woman's heart told her the whole story, and she realized that it was to save her rather than the train that the man had taken that mad ride down the hillside.

Χ.

WHAT BLAIR TOLD THE DIRECTORS.

Those long August and September days had been irksome indeed to Ellis Blair. True, he suffered no pain; but the inactivity was even harder to bear

than pain to a man of his strenuous and stirring temperament.

Prone he la, through them upon his couch, unable to move, to hear, or speak; incapable, indeed, of making known his slightest wish except by way of an affirmative or negative movement of the eyelids in answer to a written question.

The doctor had considered for a time the formulating of a sort of Morse alphabet which would permit his patient to communicate with those about him by opening and closing his eyes; but he realized that what the sick man needed more than anything else was rest and repose, and he feared that the strain of this eyelid telegraphy would prove too taxing.

How was the doctor to know of those perplexing, eager questions which were seething in that silent brain, of the fierce unrest and anxiety which beset this

strong man of affairs?

Ellis realized, on his own side, that his recovery would be only retarded by worry and bother, and for the most part he held a firm grip upon himself, refusing to allow his mind to dwell upon the problems which confronted him on every side. But he was not utterly an automaton; there were times when he could not help but ponder, and then he would almost go mad.

What had become of his business? What were they saying of him in New York? And then his thoughts would

drift in another direction.

What had become of Evelyn Blair? What did she think when he failed to meet her in Yoctangee, as he promised? Did she know of his plight? Had she been on that train?

And so on, until his brain fairly reeled under the stress of his speculations.

He afterward felt that he must have died during that period when all his senses were enchained and he had no outlet for his feelings had it not been for the encouragement given him by the doctor and the tender, sympathetic care of Mrs. Collier.

When his troubles multiplied about him and his fate seemed too grievous to be borne, when despair clutched at his heart and all the future seemed dark, her soft hand upon his brow soothed and comforted him. He clung to her as a drowning man might to a plank, and she, in return, gave him unremitting care and attention

Gradually, though very slowly, he began to improve. He gained some slight control over his limbs; his muscles no longer were entirely free from his volition.

But he was still deaf and dumb; he was still unable to communicate to those about him the questions he so longed to ask

Yet the recovery steadily progressed, and at last came a day when he was strong enough to be lifted from the bed and again dressed in his clothes, to be seated in an easy chair by the open window.

Ah, how he enjoyed it! The soft, balmy September breeze swept into his nostrils. He could lift up his eyes to the distant hills, beginning to array themselves now in their gorgeous autumn livery of gold and crimson and scarlet.

He saw a carriage drive up to the front of the house, and thought, with a pang, that some visitor was coming who would claim the time of Mrs. Collier and keep her away from him.

A moment later the door of his room opened. He did not hear it, of course, but he felt the presence of some one, and he instinctively turned his head.

Then all his soul leaped for one moment into his eyes. Forgetful of the fetters which bound him, he sprang to his feet—yes, sprang to his feet, and his lips, so long silent, gave vent to the glad exclamation: "Evelyn Blair!"

The shock, the joy, the unexpectedness of seeing her, had swept away the paralysis, and as he stood there he was again the strong, alert young fellow in full possession of all his faculties.

She stood gazing at him in surprise. Her lips were smiling wistfully, but the tears were not far from her eyes.

"Why, Mr. Ellis!" she said wonderingly. "They told me you were very ill."

"Ill? No," he answered, coming forward to greet her. "Your coming has healed me. Thank God, I am as well as I ever was in all my life.

"But do not call me Ellis," he added.

"That was all a mistake. I want to appear before you in my true colors. My name is Ellis Blair."

Mrs. Collier had followed Evelyn into the room, and had stood gazing at Blair with an expression half of joy and half of apprehension as she saw him so thor-

oughly restored.

Now, at his words, she started back with a cry of amazement, and was so greatly agitated that she would have fallen had not Blair quickly stepped forward and supported her.

"Ellis Blair?" she repeated wildly. "Who are you, man, and where do you

come from?"

"That is just what I want to find out myself," broke in Ellis; "and I think you can tell me, for I have a letter written to Horace McCutcheon by you over twenty years ago."

Then the whole story came out. Ellis was not, as he had feared, the brother of Evelvn, but was a second cousin, the child of another sister of McCutcheon.

The garrulous old farmer who had first put him in touch with the truth that night at the Bainville tavern had got a little mixed in his facts. The boy that McCutcheon had taken was not Ellis Blair's son, and Blair had simply acted for his sister-in-law in trying to recover him from McCutcheon's custody.

"Then who am I, and what is my name?" broke in Ellis impatiently.

"Your name," responded the sweet-faced old lady, "is Ellis Collier, and I" -she opened her arms wider-" I am your mother!"

After the natural transports of the mother and son, thus strangely reunited, had somewhat died down, Cousin Eve-

lvn had a word or two to say.

She sketched out rapidly for the young man the events which had been taking place in New York during his absence, the machinations that had been carried on by his enemies, and the deplorable state into which his business affairs had fallen.

Ellis listened in a perturbed, worried fashion, striding up and down the room as Evelyn talked, clenching his hands and frowning during the recital of the tale.

When she had finished, he turned abruptly to his mother.

"I am sorry to leave you so soon, mother," he said, "but you can see that it is necessary I should start for New York at once.

"How soon can I catch a train?" hee

asked of the girl.

"We must leave for Yoctangee immediately," she replied. "We can just about make the two-thirty north-bound."

"We?" he said, with uplifted eve-

brows.

"Certainly," she laughed. "I have to go back to my business as well as

His mother, apprehensive for his health, strove to make him stay over until the following day; but he would listen to no delay, and within an hour he and Evelyn were en route to the Yoctangee station.

As they drove along through the fertile valley she glanced back at the "Divide," towering in the background.

"Your ride down that brought you a mother, did it not?" she said contemplatively.

He leaned over and took one of her

hands in his.

"May I not also hope that it has brought me a wife, Evelyn?" he asked.

On the 15th of September, when the directorate of the Great Atlantic Importing and Exporting Company gathered for its meeting, the members were surprised to find their secretary and general manager ready to receive them, composed and smiling.

He refused to answer a single question until he had them all together and had called in the representatives of the

press.

Then he said: "Gentlemen, your experts have examined my books and have found every penny accounted for; the rumors affecting my integrity have all been disproved. I am back again, ready for business."

"But where have you been?" they de-

manded in chorus.

"Where have I been?" repeated El-"Why, on my wedding trip, of lis. course."

And on the spot the directorate voted him a silver dinner service as an appropriate present.

# KING OR COUNTERFEIT?\*

BY BERTRAM LEBHAR.

Author of "Caught," "No Way Out," "Flat-Broke," and "Who and Why?"

A challenge that was unaccountable, followed by a discovery that electrified.

## SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Bob Willis and Dick Cales, ensigns on the United States battle-ship Arizona, while guests at a gala ball given on board a visiting French flag-ship, are conversing concerning a curious "Personal" that has just appeared in the Herald. This offers one hundred do. a curious "Personal" that has just appeared in the Herald. This offers one hundred delars reward for information concerning the present whereabouts of one Carl Richard Felix, son of the late Ferdinand Felix, of Wyoming. Willis casually mentions to Cales that he had once met young Felix on the football field, and describes a curious seal branded into the fellow's shoulder. At this point in their talk both ensigns notice that a tall Frenchman is listening intently to what they are saying. A little later this same Frenchman wilfully picks a foolish quarrel with Willis, and forces him to fight a duel.

The Frenchman turns out to be Lieutenant Duval, of the French navy, who has done secret service in Nordinia. The duel takes place on the Jersey shore, and Willis is wounded in the shoulder, Duval expressing regret that he has not killed his antagonist outright. While Willis is in the hospital he and Cales ponder over the persistent hatred of the Frenchman for Willis, and finally conclude that the curious seal on the shoulder of the much-wanted Carl Richard Felix must be at the bottom of it.

They become more convinced of this when, a week later, they read in the papers of the

They become more convinced of this when, a week later, they read in the papers of the death of the King of Nordinia, and that an American, Carl Felix, has been declared heir to the throne. He is, it seems, the son of a Nordinian prince who had contracted a morganatic marriage and emigrated to the United States, where he brought up his only son in ignorance of the fact that he was of royal blood.

The Arizona sails to Nordinia to take part in the coronation exercises. While on shore-leave Willis and Cales see Duval with a military escort and learn that he is the king's secretary. They catch a glimpse of the beautiful Princess Cornelia, betrothed to the king, and then see Carl Felix himself. Willis is startled. He insists that the king is not the real Carl Felix, but an impostor, and determines to stop the coronation.

Though Cales scouts the idea of an impostor, he goes with Willis for aid from Rear-Admiral Rempton. The latter thinks Willis intoxicated or crazy and refuses to listen to the story. Willis becomes more determined and says solemnly: "I cannot let this impostor, he growned king."

postor be crowned king.

## CHAPTER IX (Continued).

THROUGH THE PROPER CHANNELS.

THE admiral's eyes were almost pop-

ping out of his head.

"And I want you to understand, sir," he thundered, "that I cannot allow one of my junior officers to stand in my presence and tell me that he is determined to do something that I have forbidden him to do. Do you understand that, sir? One more word of insolence from you and I will have you courtmartialed. You'd better be careful, sir."

"I don't mean to be insolent," said Willis, "but I would rather resign my commission in the United States navy than remain silent and inactive while this fraud is being perpetrated-"

He was interrupted by an expression of alarm from Cales.

"For Heaven's sake, be careful,

Bob," he whispered.

"Admiral Rempton," continued Willis earnestly, "I have appealed to you thus far as my superior officer, but now I appeal to you as one American citizen to another. This man, Carl Richard Felix—the real Carl Richard Felix is an American, born and bred beneath the Stars and Stripes. Are you going to stand by, sir, and see him wronged by an impostor? It is your duty as an American citizen, sir, to interfere—"

\*This story began in the November issue of THE ARGOSY. The two back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 20 cents.

"Stop!" roared the admiral, his face livid with rage. "You have gone far enough. I won't listen to your insolence any longer. You-you presume to instruct me as to my duties as an American! Confound your impudence, you young puppy; how dare you? By gad, sir, I'll make an example of you. I'll have you court-martialed and dismissed the service. Go to your quarters, and consider yourself under arrest."

"I'll make but one request of you, sir," said the unfortunate Willis. "Will you let me tell my story to the American minister here? Let me place the matter

"No. sir," cried the admiral. "I'll not grant your request. I'll not have the American minister bothered by such foolishness. Go to your quarters, sir, and stay there until further notice."

"Will you allow me to send a cablegram to Washington, sir?" persisted

Willis.

"Confound your impudence! No, sir!"

"Then you refuse to allow me to appeal to the American minister? You refuse to allow me to do anything to prevent this fraud from going through? And you yourself refuse to act in the matter. Very well, sir; I shall hold you responsible for the consequences."

"Go to your quarters, sir, at once. I don't want to hear another word from

you. You are under arrest."

"Very good, sir," said Willis, salut-

ing.
"And what am I to do, sir?" asked

Cales anxiously.

"You can go to the devil!" cried the exasperated admiral. "Clear out of here, both of you."

Long after the two ensigns had departed the admiral's face wore a scowl

of annoyance and indignation.

"The impudent puppy!" he mut-"Had the presumption to try to teach me my duty as an American citizen! I'll show him before I get through. I've never been so insulted since I was made an admiral. And by a bit of a boy, too. Confound his impudence!

"What a crazy story he tells, too. An impostor on the throne of Nordinia! Pshaw! He's been reading romances, and has got his head full of them. The

crazy young fool!

"Of course, there's no chance of there being any truth in his story," he added to himself, a little later. "If there was any truth in it, though, it would be a very serious matter. An impostor on the throne of Nordinia! Phew! What an international scandal there'd be! If I thought there was the slightest possibility of there being a shred of fact in what that young idiot told me I'd go ashore and see the American minister. But of course I'll do nothing of the kind. The story is ridiculous on its face. The young jackanapes furnished no proofs to back up his assertion. I'd make a laughing-stock of myself by interfering. The young puppy seemed mighty positive, though. And there's just one chance in a million that he is right. That's all. Just one chance in a million.

"Well, I reckon it would not be doing any harm if I was to go ashore and have a quiet little talk with the American minister. If he thinks enough of the young fool's story to take any steps, why, it's up to him. If he thinks, as I do, that the thing is absurd, there'll be no harm done. Yes, I guess the safest thing for me to do is to have a little talk with our minister."

He called his flag-officer.

"Have my gig got ready," he commanded. "I'm going ashore."

## CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF THE SEAL.

AFTER the admiral had told the object of his visit in a few words, Mr. Carruthers, the American minister to Nordinia, shook his head doubtfully.

"It's a pretty serious business for us to mix up in, admiral," he said. would lead, probably, to my recall, and I'm not anxious to be recalled. I'm very comfortable here. You say this ensign has no proofs to back his contention?"

"No proofs whatever."

"He's only seen Carl Richard Felix once before."

"Yes, and that was several years ago. It's more than likely he's forgotten his face by this time. I shouldn't advise you to attach any importance to the young man's story, Mr. Carruthers.

"All young men are apt to jump at hasty conclusions, you know. I thought you'd look at the matter the way I do. Nevertheless, I deemed it my duty to let you know about it. It does no harm to be careful, you know."

"Quite right, admiral. And now that you have let me know, I must confess that I am worried. If there should be any truth in this amazing story, it would be my plain duty to act at once. I want to do my duty, and at the same time I don't want to make a fool of myself and get into hot water."

"Well, I don't think that you'll be taking much of a chance if you dismiss this whole thing from your mind. The young man's tale is manifestly absurd. Imagine an impostor having the nerve to steal a throne! Such things only happen in novels—not in real life."

But you see, admiral, the circumstances surrounding Prince Carl Richard's succession to the throne are very unusual. There's the rub. If he had come by his crown in the ordinary way we might dismiss this story of your ensign as ridiculous and unworthy of consideration. But, you see, Nordinia has obtained its present king in a most unusual and romantic fashion. They had to go to America to find him. I understand they had to advertise in the Herald before they could learn his whereabouts. It must be admitted that there were opportunities for an impostor to get in his work. It's quite possible. This young man's story may be a wild flight of the imagination; but then, again, it may be true."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" demanded the admiral, a trifle uneasily. "You're not going to try to have the coronation ceremony postponed until investigations can be made,

are you?"

"No; that's the trouble. We've got no time to go into the matter properly. If we had a week or so, for instance, I could cable Washington and put the matter in the hands of the State Department. As it is now, I don't know what to do."

"The young man mentioned some-

thing about the real Carl Richard Felix having a curious seal branded on his shoulder," said the admiral. "That clue wouldn't do you any good, would it? We'd hardly get a chance to examine his majesty's shoulder, would we?"

"Hardly," replied the minister, with a smile. "Perhaps the best thing I could do would be to have a private and confidential talk with Baron Zagart, the

premier.

"I don't know how the old fellow will take it. He's a queer sort of chap. He'll probably flare up in a rage at my presumption. Still, I think it's the best course I can pursue. I'll have to exercise my greatest diplomacy in approaching him. Would you care to come along with me, admiral?"

"I don't mind going along," said the admiral. "But don't draw me into this affair if you can help it. Do you want to take the young man with us?"

"No, I guess not. If the baron is interested we can send for him afterward. I don't like this business. It's a very delicate matter. Still, I guess it's the best course to pursue."

He ordered his carriage, and they

drove to the premier's office.

Baron Zagart was a tall old man of very distinguished bearing. He had been premier of Nordinia for many years, and was much respected and beloved by the people.

He received the Americans in his private chamber when he heard that they had come to see him on a confidential

matter of great importance.

"Baron," began the American minister, when they had exchanged the usual salutation and compliments, "the matter which brings me here now is such a delicate one that I almost hesitate to broach the subject. Only my friendship for Nordinia gives me courage to do so. I must beg you in advance not to take offense at what I have to say. I am here more in a personal capacity than in an official one."

"I trust that your excellency will speak unreservedly," said the baron, with an engaging smile. "It would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for your excellency to say anything that would give offense either to Nordinia or to my humble self."

"Well, the matter is just this, baron," went on the minister. "One of the young officers of Admiral Rempton's squadron claims to have had the honor of knowing King Carl Richard in America. They met in a football game, while the king was at college, it seems. Now, this young man saw the king today, and he comes to the admiral with a startling statement that his majesty is not the Carl Richard he had met before. Of course, the young man's story is absurd, but he sincerely believes that an imposture may have been practised upon you and upon the people of Nordinia. His suspicions are undoubtedly baseless. and I repeat that I hope that you will not take offense that I have presumed to mention them to you.

"Considering, however, the romantic and unusual circumstances under which the present king was obtained, and the consequent possibility of a fraud having been perpetrated, I deemed it my duty, as one having the best interests of Nordinia at heart, to make you acquainted with this young man's story, improbable though it sounds."

Baron Zagart smiled.

"If I understand your excellency aright," he said, "you fear that what you Americans call 'a bunco game' may have been worked on Nordinia, and that the present king is not Carl Richard, the late king's nephew, but an impostor. Is not that your meaning, your excellency?"

"Well, of course I entertain no such belief. Both the admiral and myself denounce the young man's claim as absurd. Realizing, though, that in this century all things are possible, and that the unexpected sometimes happens, we deemed it an imperative duty to come to you with this story."

The baron shook his head.

"I thank you, gentlemen, for the interest you have shown, and I assure you that I fully appreciate your motive in coming here, but what this young man suspects is impossible, your excellency."

"Very good," said the American minister. "I'm very glad to hear you say so with such positive emphasis, baron. Of course, that closes the incident so far as we are concerned. We must apologize for having taken up your valuable time."

"Not at all, your excellency," said the baron. "Before you go I would like to take your time long enough to explain to you just why I am so positive that no fraud has been practised. I do not wish you to go away with the impression that I have carelessly disregarded the warning you have kindly given to Nordinia."

"If you care to explain, we shall be deligted to listen," rejoined the minister. "But first we must assure you that

no explanation is necessary."

"I would like to explain," said the baron, "so that in case this question should ever come up again all your doubts will be set at rest.

"You are aware, of course, of the unusual circumstaces under which the present King of Nordinia was born. You know, of course, as all the world knows, that he is the son of the late Prince Carl Richard, brother of the late king.

"Some years ago I had occasion to go to Washington, the capital of your great country, on a diplomatic visit.

"At that time I believed, as all the world believed, that my dear friend Prince Carl Richard was dead—that he had committed suicide because of his unfortunate love-affair. You are acquainted with the story, of course.

"What was my surprise, therefore, when the prince appeared at the Nordinian embassy in Washington and made himself known to me. I was overjoyed to see him, and to learn that he was alive, and begged him to return to Nordinia with me, as the king, his brother, was in ill health and the king's only son a frail child, who was not expected to live many years.

"The prince, however, refused, and said that he was much happier as Ferdinand Felix, an American settler, than he had ever been as a prince of Nordinia.

"The prince had with him a five-yearold boy—a bright, handsome little chap. He introduced this boy to me as his son. He told me that the boy did not know that his father was a prince of Nordinia, and that he intended to keep him in ignorance of the fact.

"All these things I stated in my proclamation issued upon the death of the late king.

"I am going to tell your excellency

something now, however, which I did not state in the proclamation. It is one of the principal reasons why I am able to say without any investigation that this young naval officer's story is absurd.

"After the prince had introduced me to his boy, he bared the child's right shoulder and revealed to me a curious ceal which had been branded into his

delicate flesh.

"'Do you know what that is?' the prince asked me.

"Of course, I confessed my ignorance.
"That,' said the prince, 'is my private seal. I have branded it upon my boy's shoulder so that in case it should ever be necessary to establish his identity he will be known by that brand. There is not another seal like it in the world, and only one impression of it has ever been made.

"'That impression I have imprinted upon a piece of parchment I am going to place in your hands, baron, together with an affidavit as to its significance.'

"The prince then went on to say that he had destroyed the seal, so that no other impression of it could ever be taken, and that in case it should ever be necessary to identify his son I would be able to do so by comparing the mark on his shoulder with the seal-impression on the piece of parchment he had given me.

"In conclusion, he begged me, for old times' sake, to look out for his son if the latter should ever be in trouble and

I should hear of it.

"' My boy shall never know what the seal means, unless you at some time see fit to tell him, baron,' went on the prince, 'and I trust that you will not acquaint him with the secret of the seal except under circumstances of the greatest necessity.'"

The admiral and the American minister exchanged a significant look, each recalling that Ensign Willis had made mention of the seal-mark on the real

Carl Richard's shoulder.

"Well, gentlemen," went on Baron Zagart, "soon afterward the king's son died, leaving no direct heir to the throne. When, many years afterward, the king himself died, it looked as if we were to have no king, and that the demand of the radical party for a Nordinian republic would have to be granted.

"Under these circumstances, I deemed it my cluty to look for Carl Richard, the elder, to try to induce him to take his late brother's throne.

"Upon inquiry, I discovered that Prince Carl Richard was dead, but that his son was alive, and had grown up and graduated from an American college.

"I determined to present the young Carl Richard to the people of Nordinia as their king, so, while the late king was lying ill abed and the court physicians pronounced his case hopeless I made a secret visit to America, accompanied by Baron Gerkin, our prefect of police, and Mr. Sanders, an American attached to our state department—you know him, of course.

"We went to New York, and started to hunt for Carl Richard the younger. We traced his career up to the time of his graduation from college, but after that time we could find no trace of him.

"We were at last forced to advertise

for him in the newspapers.

"In answer to our advertisement, a young man came to our hotel and declared that he was Carl Richard Felix, son of the late Ferdinand Felix, of

Wyoming.

"If this young man had declared that he was the son of a prince of Nordinia I should at once have become suspicious. But he evidently did not know that his father was a prince, and appeared incredulous when I intimated the fact to him.

"'My father was a plain American settler,' he said. 'I know that he was a Nordinian, but I am sure that he was no prince. If he had been, I am confident he would have mentioned the fact

to me; but he never did so.

"Now that, of course, was a good sign, for the prince had told me that he intended to keep his son in ignorance of his royal descent. I then asked the young man to bare his right shoulder, which he did with seeming reluctance. On that right shoulder, gentlemen, was branded an exact duplicate of the impression the prince had given to me."

"Confound that young fool of an ensign!" muttered the admiral, under

his breath. -

"You see, gentlemen," continued the baron triumphantly, "there was little chance for an impostor there. I asked the young man how he had come by that seal-mark, and he answered that he did not know; that he had borne it since his birth, and that his father had always refused to explain its meaning to him.

"That was not all, however. I next asked the young man if he had ever seen me before. He replied that he was not sure, but that I somewhat resembled a gentleman his father had taken him to visit at Washington when he was a little boy. It seems he has a good memory, for he described a curious ruby ring I had worn on my finger at the time. He mentioned other incidents that had passed at the interview between his father and myself, which convinced me as to his identity.

"I had even more proof, however. It seems that while at college this young man played on the football team. He produced five young men who had been fellow members of his team. They came to my hotel and identified him as Carl

Richard Felix.

"Under the circumstances, gentlemen, I felt no hesitancy in bringing this young man back here with me and proclaiming him King of Nordinia. I think you will agree with me that this young naval officer's tale is hopelessly absurd."

"I should say so," said the American minister, rising. "It is very good of you, baron, to have honored us with this confidence. I am glad to see that our foolish young ensign's suspicions were so baseless. I am sure that the admiral here will see to it that the young man does not get an opportunity to repeat

this ridiculous story."

"I certainly shall," affirmed the admiral grimly. "This matter has turned out just as I believed it would, baron. I have ordered this young fool confined to his quarters under arrest while we are in port here. He shall not give you any further vexation. I shall see to it, too, that he is severely punished for allowing his imagination to get the best of him in this unfortunate way."

As they walked down the steps of the state department building they passed Lieutenant Duval, private secretary to

the king.

The American minister nodded to the Frenchman.

"There is one fellow I can't tolerate," he whispered to the admiral. "If ever a man bore the stamp of rogue and scoundrel on his face, that chap does. How on earth the king came to make him his private secretary I can't understand. It was that fact that made me at first inclined to believe that there might be something in your young ensign's story. Even kings must be judged by the company they keep."

Lieutenant Duval stood on the steps of the state department building and watched the retreating forms of the two

Americans with a scowl.

"Private interview with the baron, eh?" he muttered. "Sacré! I wonder what those Yankee pigs were after!"

## CHAPTER XI.

## A DESPERATE PLAN.

THE admiral returned to his flag-ship

in a very ugly mood.

"Confound it all!" he growled as he went to his cabin. "I've made a blamed fool of myself, just as I supposed I would. I suppose Carruthers is calling me an idiot at this precise moment for taking any notice of that young fool's wild yarn. Come to think of it, though, Carruthers is no better off than I am. I advised him to dismiss the matter as too absurd to bother about, but he insisted on going to the Nordinian premier. I reckon he's in the same boat as myself when it comes to making a fool of oneself. Confound that young ensign, anyway! He shall suffer for the bother he's put me to, I'll promise him."

He gave orders that Ensign Willis should be summomed before him forth-

with.

"Well, young man," snapped the admiral when the ensign, looking pale and apprehensive, appeared, "I suppose you're still positive that the King of Nordinia is an impostor, eh?"

"Yes, sir," replied Willis firmly.

"And I suppose you've made up your mind to lodge a complaint against me at Washington because I refused to listen to your fool story and to take any action upon it, eh?"

Willis looked his superior officer

straight in the eyes.

"If this fraud is subsequently discovered, as I believe it will be," he said, "I regret to say, sir, that I shall deem it my duty to report to the Secretary of the Navy that you had a chance to prevent this impostor from being crowned King of Nordinia and that you refused

to take action."

"Confound your impudence!" cried the admiral. "Well, let me tell you, sir, that your report will be lacking in truth. I have seen fit to take action concerning your ridiculous story. I have been foolish enough to report the matter to the American minister, Mr. Carruthers, not -not because I feared any trouble that you might try to make for me at Washington, you understand, sir, but because I desired to be fair to you in this matter. I don't want any of my officers to think that I have treated them unjustly."

"Ha!" exclaimed Willis hopefully. "And the American minister will in-

vestigate this matter, sir?"

"The American minister has investigated," replied the admiral grimly. That is why I have sent for you now.

"And he finds that my suspicions are

justified?" asked Willis eagerly.

" He finds that you are even more of a fool than I suspected. He has gone to the trouble of taking the matter to Baron Zagart, the premier of Nordinia. The baron has furnished the most convincing proofs as to the identity of the king. You mentioned the seal-mark that the real Carl Richard Felix bore on his shoulder---'

"Yes, sir," exclaimed the ensign,

with parted lips.

"The baron assures us that the man who will be crowned king to-morrow bears that very mark upon his shoulder. You see, now, how likely your story is, don't you, young man?"

Ensign Willis uttered an exclamation

of surprise.

The admiral smiled his satisfaction at the other's evident discomfiture.

"What have you got to say to that?"

he demanded.

"That seal-mark must be a forgery," stammered the surprised ensign. "I am positive, sir, that that man is not the real Carl Richard Felix."

"Confound you!" cried the admiral impatiently. "You're the most obsti-

nate young man I've ever had to deal with. I sent for you, thinking that perhaps you'd be willing, in the face of such proofs, to admit that you were mistaken and to apologize for your rudeness to me. As it is, I see that you're a hopeless case. Return to your quarters, sir. You're under arrest until the courtmartial."

"For what am I to be court-martialed. sir?" demanded Willis. "For doing my duty as an American citizen? if I were wrong in believing-"

"No! Not for that," broke in the admiral hastily. "It was not wrong of you, young man, to call the matter to my attention, so long as you conscientiously entertained those suspicions. In fact, I might say that it was your duty to do so. But your insolence at our last interview is not to be brooked. dared to try to teach me my duty. You spoke to me as if I were an ensign and vou an admiral of the United States navy. I cannot tolerate such conduct. I shall have you court-martialed on charges of insubordination and conduct unbecoming an officer. That is all, sir, Go back to your quarters."

He waved his hand toward the door, as a sign that the interview was over, and stiffly saluting, Willis withdrew. He went back to his stateroom, and closing its door behind him, flung himself upon his bed, a prey to dejection and despair.

"I'm in a pretty hole," he muttered— "a pretty hole. I suppose I'll be dismissed from the service. Curse the day I met Carl Richard Felix!"

"Hello, there, Bob!" exclaimed a voice coming, apparently, from nowhere.

"What did he say?"

Willis walked over to a crack in the partition of his stateroom. Cales's cabin adjoined his, and the chums sometimes conversed in this way.

"He's determined to have me courtmartialed for insubordination and conduct unbecoming an officer," growled

"Phew!" whistled Cales. "That's bad. Well, say, old man, he can't convict you. You weren't guilty of insubordination or conduct unbecoming an officer. No court-martial would look at your act that way. You were a little emphatic in what you said, but you

weren't insolent. I'll testify to that. Don't you worry. He's only bluffing."

"Well, strange to say, old man, I'm not worrying about that court-martial as much as I am about something else he told me," said Willis.

"What was that?"

"Why, despite his refusal to take any action about the matter, it seems that the old boy weakened and went ashore to see the American minister."

"He did?" exclaimed Cales eagerly.

"The American minister investigated. He went at once to see old Baron Zagart, and the premier denounced my story as absurd, and, according to the admiral, furnished the most convincing proofs that the fellow they're going to crown as king is the real Carl Richard Felix. He even bears that seal-mark on his shoulder. How does that strike you, Dick?"

"Well, I suppose that that convinces you that you've made a darned big mistake. I told you to be careful," growled Cales. "You see, your suspicions were without foundation, after all."

"No, I don't see it," said Willis stubbornly. "I'm just as convinced as ever that the man they're going to crown

king to-morrow is a fakir."

"Oh, hang it all, Bob! How can you be so confoundedly unreasonable?" said Cales angrily. "It would serve you right if you were court-martialed and dismissed from the service, you stubborn idiot."

"Have you ever read the 'Prisoner of Zenda,' Dick?" asked Willis.

"Yes. And so have you, I'll bet," retorted Cales. "That's probably where you've got all your foolishness about this king business, and I've been idiot enough to listen to you."

"Well, you remember the plot in the 'Prisoner of Zenda,' don't you? high moguls at court put a fake king on the throne to save the throne, you

remember."

"But that's only a fiction story."

"I know. But it gives me a new idea. Perhaps Baron Zagart is in this plot. He may know about this fellow being a fakir. I never looked at it that way before. I've thought until now that the baron and the court were being duped by a gang of conspirators. Now I'm in-

clined to believe that the baron and some of the court officials may be among the conspirators themselves. It may be a court plot to save the throne of Nordinia."

"Well, if it is so, where do we come in to interfere? If they know that they've got a fake king, and are determined to crown him anyway, it's their business, not ours."

"Yes, but where does the real Carl

Richard come in?"

"Perhaps he's dead," suggested Cales. "Or perhaps they couldn't find him and had to run in a ringer for him to save the republicans from getting hold of the throne. That's a very likely theory, Bob. If it's actually the case, where is the sense in our butting in?"

"I'll admit that there's reason in what you say, Dick. It changes the whole complexion of this affair, of course. If it were as I thought at first, that that confounded Frenchman was at the head of this plot and that the government of Nordinia was being buncoed, it would be our business to put them wise."

"Exactly," assented Cales; "but if, on the other hand, the government of Nordinia is going into this thing with its eyes open and knows that their king is a fakir, why, it's up to them, and none of our affair. They're selecting their

king, and we're not."

"Very good. But there's one person we're leaving out of consideration.

"Your friend Carl Richard Felix, I suppose you mean," said Cales. "Well, I told you, he may be dead, or he may have refused to take the throne, or something."

"No, I didn't refer to Carl Richard

Felix," said Willis.

"Who, then?"

"You remember that beautiful young girl who rode by in the carriage today."

"You mean the Princess Cornelia?"

" Exactly."

"Well, what about her? What's she got to do with the matter?" asked Cales.

"What's she got to do with the matter? I guess you're forgetting, Dick, that right after the coronation she's to marry the King of Nordinia."

"Phew! I was forgetting that."

"Well, do you think that she knows about the plot? Do you think that she knows that the man who is to be her husband is not of kingly blood, but a miserable fakir? Are we going to stand by. Dick, and see this wretched trick worked upon this beautiful girl?"

"Well, who's saying that it is a "The chances trick?" insisted Cales. are about a million to one that this fellow is the real bona-fide, fast-color, dved-in-the-wool king, and that your suspicions are all tommyrot. I want to say right now that upon that point I side

with the admiral.'

"Well, I don't. And even though I can't stop this fakir from being crowned king to-morrow, I'm going to make a desperate attempt to expose this conspiracy in time to prevent the princess from falling a victim to it."

"And how are you going to do it?" inquired Cales. "Remember, you're a prisoner on this battle-ship. You're

helpless."

"I've got an idea," said Willis. "It's a wonder it never occurred to me before. There'll be a lot of photographs taken at the coronation to-morrow. We'll get hold of some and mail them to. Billy Henderson, and ask him to get some of the old Cornell men to take a look at them. They'll see at a glance that the king in the pictures is not Carl Richard Felix. Then they can notify the State Department at Washington, and the fraud will be revealed."

"That's not at all a bad idea," assented Cales. "The only trouble is, Bob, that there won't be any pictures of the coronation taken to-morrow."

"There won't, eh? What do you mean by that?" asked the surprised

Willis.

"Doc Carson was telling me about You know, he's become a camera fiend during the past few months. He'd promised himself a lot of fine views of the coronation. Well, now he's as sore as a sick bear. He's learned that the court has issued a proclamation that no photographing whatever will be permitted to-morrow. Anybody caught near the procession with a camera will be arrested on sight. It seems that his majesty the king has always had a horror

of being photographed from his infancy

Ensign Willis gave vent to his feelings

by a forcible oath.

"Did you ever hear of the like!" he exclaimed. "A coronation and no snapshots. And all because the king has a horror of being photographed, eh? And why has he a horror of being photographed, Dick? Anybody could see the answer to that question except a bunch of thick-skulled fools. He's afraid to face the camera. He's afraid to allow any pictures of himself to appear in America. Isn't that fact of itself enough to confirm my statement that he's a fakir?"

"It certainly does look rum," assented Cales. "But then, of course, it may be merely a coincidence. There's lots of people who have an aversion to being photographed, Bob. You must admit that. Then, again, perhaps the real reason is that he's afraid of anarchists. You know, a bomb could be easily disguised as a camera."

"Well, I'm going to get a snap-shot of that fakir to-morrow," said Willis

grimly.

"You are, eh? How are you going to do it, when you're a prisoner on this battle-ship?"

"I'm going ashore."

"You're going where?" demanded the surprised Cales.

"I'm going ashore to take that picture," said Willis, with emphasis.

"You're talking ragtime, old fellow. How the deuce are you going ashore, when you're confined to your own quarters?"

"I'm going to take French leave."

"Bob Willis, you're stark, raving mad!" cried Cales, aghast.

"No, I'm not mad, but I'm determined to get a photograph of the counterfeit king. I'll succeed, too. You know me,

when my mind's made up."

"I know that you're the most obstinate fool in all the world," groaned Cales. "How on earth do you expect to get ashore, Bob? If you attempt to walk through the ward-room you'll be discovered and brought back here by force. How are you going to get to a

"I'm not going to get to a boat. I'm

a good swimmer. I'm going to swim

ashore this very night."

"Poor fellow! His mind is unhinged. I've suspected it for some time," groaned Cales. "Let me send a doctor to you, Bob. There's a good fellow."

"Don't be an ass," said Willis irritably. "It's a perfectly feasible scheme. It's only a mile to the shore, and I'm a good swimmer, as you know. Bunny lloward is to be officer of the deck tonight. You must engage him in conversation while I steal out on the quarter-deck, unperceived, and go down the

companion-ladder.

"That's your part of the plan, Dick—to get Bunny Howard in conversation, so that he doesn't spot me as I'm getting away. I know I can rely on you to accomplish that, all right. Bunny'll probably be half-shot, anyway, for I understand he's going ashore earlier in the night to attend a private dinner given by some friends of his in the British navy, and you know how liable Bunny is to drink more than is good for him at an affair of that sort. The whole thing will be easy, Dick."

"Oh, yes, very easy," groaned Cales. "I suppose you know what'll happen to you when your absence is discovered?"

"Yes. I'll be court-martialed and dismissed from the service, without doubt," said Willis grimly. "I've got to expect that. I'm hoping, though, that if I can ultimately succeed in proving this to be a gigantic fraud I shall be thanked instead of punished by the powers that be at Washington. At any rate, my dander is up now, and I'm going ahead with this thing, be the cost what it may."

"Ha!" exclaimed Cales triumphantly, struck by a sudden thought. "You'll do nothing of the kind, Bob. Clever as you think yourself, you idiot, you're forgetting one important fact, my boy. How the deuce are you going to swim ashore without getting your camera

wet?" .

"Oh, that's easy! You don't think I haven't figured all that out, do you? How am I going to get my clothing dry when I get ashore? I can't go around all night in wet clothes. You might have asked me that question, also.

"Give me credit for some common

sense, Dick. I've arranged for all that. I've got a waterproof bag here. I'll put my little kodak and a light suit of civilian clothes in this bag, and carry it on my back. When I reach the shore I'll don my dry clothes, put the kodak in my pocket, and keep in hiding for the night.

"To-morrow, when the coronation parade starts, I'll take my place among the spectators and seize the most favorable opportunity to take some stealthy snapshots of this impostor. That isn't all I intend to do, either. In addition to taking the pictures, I'll make the most of my visit ashore to see if I can't get somebody interested in this conspiracy. If I get a chance, I'll go to the princess herself and warn her against this impostor."

"You're crazy, Bob—absolutely crazy," said Cales. "But if you're determined to carry out this fool scheme, of course I'm coming along, too. We might as well both lose our jobs together."

"No, no, old man," said Willis earnestly. "It's very kind of you to offer to do it, Dick, but I couldn't permit it."

"If you go I go," said Cales doggedly. "We'll literally sink or swim to-

gether."

"No, we won't, Dick. You'll listen to reason, I know. You see, you couldn't be any help to me by coming along, and you can be a whole lot of help to me if you stay here."

"How?" demanded Cales, uncon-

vinced

"Well, in the first place, how am I going to get past the officer of the deck unless you engage him in conversation? And, besides, if anything happens to me ashore it might be well for me to have a friend aboard this ship," replied Willis grimly.

## CHAPTER XII.

"LET'S BE FRIENDS."

AFTER much argument, Cales consented.

It made him groan to think of the direful consequences in store for his chum, but he knew from experience that when Bob Willis's mind was made up to do a thing he generally did it.

At one stage Cales had threatened to go straightway to the admiral and warn

him of Willis's intentions.

"Oh, no, you won't, Dick," said Willis confidently. "I know you too well for that. You'll be a good fellow and help me, in the way I've suggested—namely, by getting Bunny Howard engaged in conversation on the deck while I slip past him."

"But you're sacrificing so much for nothing," protested Cales. "For Heaven's sake, be reasonable, Bob. Why should you spoil your whole career for something that's really no business of yours? Be sensible, and cut it out."

"I can't, old man," said Willis earnestly. "You would not ask me to do it, Dick, if you knew how very anxious I am to lay bare this plot. It isn't only that I want to save the princess from the humiliation of marrying an impostor, nor because I want to see the real Carl Richard get his rights; but remember, Dick, that that infernal French lieutenant is at the bottom of this conspiracy, without doubt. I'm going to spoil his game, if I can possibly accomplish it."

"Well, if you're determined on it, I suppose it's no use arguing any more," said Cales, with a sigh. "I'll do what I can to help you, Bob, but there isn't a chance on earth to save you from being dismissed the navy in dire disgrace, and you'll probably go to prison for desertion, besides."

"Only one chance," retorted Willis. "As I said before, Dick, if I can succeed in proving this king an impostor I don't think I'll have any trouble in getting the President to restore me to my place in the service."

Willis waited until past midnight.

At that hour Lieutenant Howard, known to his brother officers as "Bunny" Howard, took his turn as officer of the deck.

Howard had been to the British naval officers' dinner ashore, and, as Willis had prophesied, he came on duty with a head none too clear. It was an easy matter for Cales to engage Howard in an absorbing conversation on the other side of the quarter-deck while Willis, clad in light undress uniform and with the water-proof bag under his arm, stole across the deck and down the companion-ladder.

At the foot of the ladder the daring

ensign threw off his undress uniform, under which he wore a bathing-suit, and strapping the water-proof bag on his back, plunged into the ocean.

At Annapolis, Willis had won several medals for swimming, so that now he plowed through the mile of water between ship and shore without great difficulty, despite the handicap on his back.

He landed on a deserted stretch of beach, shook the water from his dripping body, dried himself with a towel he had brought with him in the bag, and then donned the suit of mufti.

This accomplished, he stood on the beach, gazed at the twinkling lights of the big battle-ship he had just left, and heaved a deep sigh at the thought that by his daring act he had severed his connection with the American navy forever.

"And after all, Dick Cales may be right," he mused. "Why should I have sacrificed so much for something that really concerns me so little? The chances are that I shall fail, anyway. These rogues will likely prove too clever for me. I guess you're pretty much of an impulsive fool, Bob Willis!"

But then he gritted his teeth, and a look of grim determination came to his face.

"No; by Jupiter, no!" he muttered.
"I can't stand by and see that infernal Frenchman get away with this dastardly plot. No man with any blood in his veins could. It's too late to turn back now, anyway, and, besides, I don't want to. I'm not going to fail. I'm going to succeed. I'm going to see that fakir fired from the throne he has stolen. I'm going to win out, as sure as my name is Bob Willis."

With this determination he turned away and strode across the beach toward the city proper. In the pocket of his coat he had had the foresight to place a five-dollar gold piece before he left the flag-ship. With this he determined to seek a night's lodging in some hotel.

He found a modest little inn near the water-front.

The innkeeper was a Nordinian who did not understand a word of English or French.

Willis, however, had little difficulty in making him understand that he wanted supper and a room, and at sight of the five-dollar gold piece the innkeeper's eyes glistened, for there is not much gold in circulation in Nordinia, and the gold piece was enough pay for more than a week's board and lodging.

Despite the momentous step he had taken and the uncertainty of what was before him, the ensign slept like a top

that night.

Next morning, at breakfast, he struck up a conversation with a Frenchman who was stopping at the inn, and from him learned the route the coronation procession was to take.

"I guess I'll go and look the ground over," he said to himself, "and find a spot where I'll be likely to stand a chance of getting some good snap-shots

without being discovered."

With this intention he walked along Palace Avenue, dodging down side streets whenever he saw a naval uniform.

"Of course, the procession will pass by here on its way to the cathedral," he mused. "I wonder if the crowds will be too great to permit of a good focus as that fakir rides by. If I had any kind of a camera but a kodak, I'd try to get on top of that roof, over there; but I'm afraid with this small instrument, the range would be too wide."

As he stood on the sidewalk of Palace Avenue admiring the coronation decorations and thus deliberating, a man walking quickly, as though in a hurry, passed him, stopped suddenly, and wheeled sharply around in his direction.

Willis turned to discover the reason for this maneuver, fearing that it was one of the officers of his ship who had recognized him and was about to place

him under arrest.

But when his eyes fell upon the other man's face he recognized him instantly and uttered an exclamation of startled surprise, which for the life of him he could not repress.

As for the other man, his face, in that brief second, changed expression three

times.

First his features assumed a look of great surprise, which immediately gave way to one of mingled annoyance and fear. And then, as if recovering himself by an extreme effort, a smile came to his face, and he advanced toward Willis.

"Pardon me," he said. "If I am not mistaken, this is Ensign Willis, of the United States navy."

"What is that to you?" growled Willis, scowling at his interrogator.

"Ah, Monsieur Willis is not willing to forgive and forget, I see," said the other man reproachfully. "Surely monsieur is generous enough to let bygones be bygones. Monsieur must admit that I defeated him fairly and honorably."

"Yes, and afterward expressed your deep disappointment that you had not succeeded in killing me," said Willis bitterly. "I'm not likely to forget that, nor the box of cigars containing an infernal machine you afterward sent me, Lieutenant Duval."

At his words, the other man changed color and the smile disappeared from his lips; but it came back again immediately.

"Monsieur is talking in riddles," he said. "I know not to what he refers when he talks of a cigar-box containing an infernal machine. As for the other matter, if it is true that on that unfortunate occasion I did express regret that my bullet did not do fatal work monsieur must be kind enough to attribute my ungenerous words to a hasty temper. I assure monsieur that at the present moment I am very glad that the unfortunate affair did not terminate more unhappily. I have nothing but good will for monsieur and beg him to be willing to forgiv: and forget."

He extended his hand, but the ensign looked at it scornfully, with his own

hands behind his back.

"Ha!" exclaimed the Frenchman!
"So there is still bitterness in monsieur's heart. He is not willing to let bygones be bygones. I am very sorry, for I should like to have the friendship of monsieur. No matter. Perhaps later we shall understand each other better."

It was on the tip of Willis's tongue to tell Duval what he thought of him then and there, in the hope of bringing about another duel. For the sight of his old enemy made him thirst for vengeance.

He reflected, however, that if he took any such step it would interfere with his work in hand. He therefore determined to wait until a more convenient time. "Yes," he contented himself with replying, "perhaps later we shall understand each other better, Lieutenant Duval."

"May I ask if Monsieur Willis is connected with the American squadron here?" asked Duval, glancing at the other's mufti.

"No," answered Willis shortly. "I

have left the navy."

"Ha! And may I ask, then, what is the object of your visit to Nordinia?"

went on the Frenchman quickly.

Willis hesitated. Again it was on his lips to tell this fellow then and there that he knew his little game and that he was there to expose it to the world. But once more prudence came to the rescue, and he replied, "Oh, I am here, like many others, to see the coronation."

Willis fancied that a look of uneasiness flashed across the Frenchman's face as he heard this reply. If so, how-

ever, it disappeared instantly.

"And has monsieur already procured a place from which to view the coronation procession?" inquired Duval. "It is to be a magnificent spectacle, and the crowds, of course, will be great."

"No," said Willis, "I haven't selected a place as yet. I suppose I shall have no difficulty in finding one somewhere,

though."

The Frenchman shook his head.

"I am afraid monsieur will discover he is too late," he said. "All the seats have been reserved days in advance. Monsieur can, of course, stand on the sidewalk; but the crowds will be large, and monsieur would not be able to see much there. Besides, to stand for several hours would be very fatiguing and uncomfortable."

"Oh, I reckon I'll get along all

right," said Willis curtly.

"If monsieur would permit me the honor," went on the Frenchman hesitatingly, "I can find him a seat on the Balcony of Honor. He will find the view admirable, and the seat most comfortable. I would beg monsieur to accept this ticket."

As he spoke, he held out a piece of

pasteboard.

"Ah!" thought Willis. "Some trick to prevent me from seeing this fake king as he rides by. I'm on to his game.

"Where is this Balcony of Honor situated?" he asked

"On Palace Avenue, right over there," replied the Frenchman, pointing to a grand stand erected on the sidewalk a

little farther up the street.

"The balcony is especially built for some of the best people of Nordinia. Monsieur will find himself in good company. Monsieur's seat would be in the front row—a coveted place. I beg monsieur to do me the honor to accept."

Willis took the card with a murmur

of thanks.

"Looks pretty good," he reflected. "I

wonder what his game can be?"

"I beg monsieur not to thank me," said the Frenchman, bowing. "Such a favor is too slight to mention. Perhaps in the future I may be permitted to do monsieur a real favor. I should like to demonstrate my friendship. How long does monsieur intend to stay in Nordinia?"

"Oh, only a few days," answered Willis.

"Perhaps, during that time, monsieur will find opportunity to pay me a visit at the palace. Monsieur knows, I suppose, that I have the honor to be the king's private secretary?"

"No, I did not know that you were the king's secretary," replied Willis, with

emphasis on the word "king."

To save his life he could not refrain from this little insinuation. If the Frenchman noted the emphasis, how-

ever, he gave no sign.

"Yes," he said, "his majesty has been kind enough to honor me with the post. If I can do anything for monsieur at court, I hope that he will command me. Of course, I need scarcely say that his majesty has a special preference for Americans. I hope to have the pleasure of presenting you to the king before you leave Nordinia, monsieur. Until then, adieu."

He did not venture to court another slight by extending his hand, but with a low bow, and doffing his hat, he turned and went on his way, leaving the ensign rooted to the spot with amazement.

"By George, he's a cool one!" muttered Willis, as he watched the Frenchman's retreating form. "He carries off his game with a big bluff. I wonder if he really would have the nerve to present me to the king, and I wonder if that fakir would have the temerity to grant me an audience. I've a good mind to put them to the test to-morrow. I've a notion to beard the lion in his den and see how they'll carry out their bluff.

"I wonder why he gave me this ticket to that grand stand. It can't be possible that he would really wish me to see the fake king, for he knows that I know the real king, Carl Richard Felix. What's his game, I wonder? The grand stand, over there, is undoubtedly the best place to view the parade. A front-row seat, too. Why, sitting there I could almost touch the robes of the fake king as he rode by to and from the cathedral. There must be some infernal trick in this. I'll be on my guard."

# CHAPTER XIII. WHAT CAN IT MEAN?

WILLIS examined the piece of pasteboard he held in his hand.

It was an oblong card, about the size of a regulation postal card. On it was engraved some Nordinian words, and a blank space, evidently left for the purpose, had been filled in with the pen.

Willis could not read the Nordinian, but he deciphered the handwriting as the

signature of Lieutenant Duval.

"Ha! I have it!" he exclaimed. "I see through that scoundrel's trick now. This card is irregular in some respects. Perhaps it's stolen from its rightful holder, or maybe it's a forgery. At any rate, when I present it at the gate of the grand stand I suppose I'll be arrested for theft, or swindling, and dragged away to be locked up in a Nordinian prison until after the coronation is all

"A pretty scheme to get me out of the way for the time being, but it won't work. I'll investigate, first. I guess I'm as smart as he is."

He walked over to the grand stand. It was a very ornate affair, draped with gay bunting and the flags of Nordinia. Inside, the decorations were of gold and blue, and the seats were comfortable armchairs of blue plush.

"Quite a sumptuous place," mused

Willis, "One could not view the coronation procession under more comfortable circumstances, methinks.'

The grand stand was empty at that hour, but a uniformed attendant stood at the entrance, evidently on guard.

To this man, a Nordinian, Willis pre-

sented his ticket.

"Will you be good enough to show me to what seat this ticket entitles me?" he asked, with the intention of testing

the legitimacy of the card.

The man evidently did not understand what Willis said, but he examined the pasteboard, and having perused every word on it, bowed very low and conducted Willis up a short flight of stairs to a front seat—as good a seat as there was on the grand stand.

"Humph!" mused the ensign. "The card seems to work all right. My theory must be wrong, then. I wonder what the game can be? Ha! I have it now. That scoundrel has guessed my intention to take a snap-shot of the fake king, and he's put me here where I won't get a chance to work my camera. Not a bad idea. Ouite clever, in fact."

But upon further investigation he was obliged to dismiss this theory as absurd.

"Why, it's an ideal place for taking a picture," he reflected. "I couldn't wish for a better. I can conceal my kodak under this rail, here, and as the fake king rides by I can snap him with the greatest ease. Even the folks sitting next to me wouldn't be able to see me doing it, either. What is Duval's game, I wonder?"

He examined the floor of the grand stand carefully, especially that part of it beneath his seat.

"Perhaps there's a secret trap-door under here," he mused, "and while I'm watching the procession I'll be suddenly flung about two miles into the bowels of the earth."

A close investigation, however, failed to reveal any such trap. Besides, the idea seemed palpably absurd, even to such a theorist as Willis.

"Well, I think I'll take a chance," he said to himself. "I can't find anything wrong, and while I can't bring myself to believe that that infernal Frenchman gave me this ticket out of love for me, I'll accept his courtesy."

As though to dismiss the last doubts from his mind, the Nordinian attendant reappeared just then with another Nor-

dinian, who spoke English.

The attendant had evidently been puzzled by the fact that the American had come to the grand stand so many hours before the coronation, and fearing that there must be some mistake, he had summoned this second man.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but do you know that you are several hours too early?" inquired the latter of Willis.

"Yes," answered the ensign. "I merely came here to see whether this ticket is all right."

"Certainly," said the man, in surprise.
"This is your seat, according to the

ticket."

"What does the ticket say? I can't read Nordinian," explained Willis.

The man politely translated.

"It says 'Seat Number 4A. Admit the bearer to Balcony of Honor, where seat has been reserved for him. By order Pierre Duval, Secretary to the King.'"

"Oh, is that what it says?" exclaimed Willis, much relieved. "Admit bearer, eh? No name mentioned? All right; much obliged," and he walked out of the grand stand with his mind at rest.

When the hour for the coronation arrived, and the crowds began to form on the streets, he retraced his steps toward

the Balcony of Honor.

The grand stand was by this time filled with fashionably dressed women and aristocratic-looking men. Willis saw at a glance, however, that his seat was still vacant.

He again presented the piece of pasteboard to the usher, and was conducted to the blue plush armchair in the front row.

"Everything seems to be working satisfactorily, so far," he mused, as he settled himself comfortably in his seat.

"I can't see what is to prevent me from getting those snap-shots; and when I do get them, they'll prove the undoing of that fake king in very short order."

While he was waiting for the procession to arrive he amused himself studying his neighbors.

At his right sat a distinguished-look-

ing old man.

"Evidently one of the nobility, if ap-

pearances count for anything," reflected Willis. "I wonder what this dignified old chap would say and do if he knew that he's sitting here to watch the coronation of an impostor? If I thought he'd believe me, I'd tell him; but I suppose he'd treat my story as the admiral did. Besides, for all I know, he may be in the plot himself, respectable as he appears."

At his left sat a woman of considerable beauty. She was over thirty years of age, and was accompanied by a middle-aged, sour-looking man who scowled at everything she said and seemed to be

in a very bad humor.

Willis observed that the woman was deathly pale; she also appeared to be very nervous and ill at ease.

"She's evidently got something on her

mind," Willis told himself.

So he furtively watched her. Evidently her agitation was increasing. Her eyes wore an anxious, apprehensive expression, and she was continually darting side glances at her companion, of whom she evidently stood in awe.

Once she turned and looked directly at Willis, and the ensign saw her start violently, as if she recognized him.

Just then a great shout from the crowds on the sidewalks heralded the approach of the coronation procession.

First came a regiment of Nordinian cavalry, the horses richly caparisoned.

Then followed the royal band of one hundred pieces, mounted on white steeds.

After these was a procession of priests on foot, chanting as they marched.

Behind the priests rode the archbishop in an open carriage, and behind the archbishop a squad of Nordinian cuirassiers, forming a body-guard for the foreign princes and envoys, who were in carriages.

Then came the Nordinian marine band of sixty pieces, and behind the band the foreign naval detachments, the American bluejackets in the van.

At sight of them Willis sank back in his seat and put his hand before his face, fearing that he would be recognized.

First appeared a corps of marines, and then Admiral Rempton in a carriage.

As the admiral rode by Willis caught his breath and trembled apprehensively, for the admiral was so close that the ensign could almost have stretched out his hand and touched him as he passed.

The admiral bowed gracefully to the applause of the people in the Balcony of Honor. In doing so he seemed to look directly at Ensign Willis.

It was an anxious moment for Willis, but the admiral rode by without recognizing him, and the ensign heaved a heartfelt sigh of relief.

"Phew!" he muttered. "That was a

close shave!"

The danger was by no means over, however.

Behind the admiral's carriage marched the officers of the American squadron, on foot. Ensign Cales was not among them. He evidently had been ordered to stay aboard ship, but Willis recognized many of his brother officers, and quaked with apprehension lest the recognition should be mutual.

They all marched past, however, with shoulders well back and heads erect, looking neither to right nor left. Once more Willis heaved a sigh of relief.

Behind the officers came the bluejackets of the squadron. The Americans made as fine a showing as their admiral could have wished, and they were heartily applauded by the crowds.

After the Americans came the British sailors, and behind them the seamen of the other nations.

Then came another band, and Baron Zagart and his cabinet in carriages. The baron's popularity was proved by the

ovation he received all along the line.

Next followed the high nobility on foot, and behind them the royal body-

guard, four hundred strong.

Willis stealthily drew his kodak from his pocket and put it in readiness, while all eyes near him were riveted on the procession.

Mounted on a jet-black steed rode the king, bowing graciously to the excited, shouting people, who yelled themselves

hoarse as he approached.

The king was dressed in a white military uniform and wore a gold helmet. He appeared a trifle nervous, but otherwise, even Willis was forced to admit, his bearing was good, and his face prepossessing.

By his side, mounted on a milk-white

palfrey, rode the Princess Cornelia, clad in her state robes of purple and ermine.

She looked so gloriously beautiful that Willis sat entranced, and the pair had almost passed beyond range of his camera before he recollected himself, with a start, and clicked the shutter.

The king rode on the side nearest the Balcony of Honor, so that there was nothing to prevent the picture from being a good one. For safety's sake, however, Willis took two.

Then he glanced around apprehensively, to ascertain if he had been observed.

The old gentleman on his left was too busy applauding his sovereign and the princess to pay any attention to Willis. The ensign noted this fact with satisfaction.

Then he turned to the woman on his right. Had she observed his act? If so, would she denounce him?

But no! The woman was otherwise engaged. She had taken a pencil from a gold chatelaine suspended from her waist and was writing on a blank page of her official program.

Willis saw her dart a quick, apprehensive glance at her sour-visaged escort, as if to ascertain if she was observed, and then she stealthily turned to Willis, and to the ensign's surprise, handed him the program.

Consumed with curiosity, he took it, and as he read what she had written, gasped with excitement.

For the words were in English, and they read:

If you are an American and would save your own countryman, leeve this stand immediately and wait for me outside. That man who rode by is not the King of Nordinia. Don't attempt to answer this note, for my husband is watching, but leave the stand. I will join you immediately.

Willis folded the program and put it in his pocket, and then, without venturing to look at his mysterious neighbor, he rose from his seat, despite the fact that the procession was by no means over, and walked down the aisle: In a moment or two he had left the grand stand and was ready to keep this strange appointment.

(To be continued.)

## A DEAL IN SUBURBAN.

BY G. HERB PALIN.

An inheritance with a string to it, and what happened when the heir thought he had finally untied the knot.

FRANK E. HOWARD, JR., was a young man of twenty-two who possessed one hundred thousand dollars in cash and had a difficult task to perform.

He had recently inherited the money from the estate of an uncle who accumulated a million as a dealer in New York City and suburban properties, and who, when dying, made a will leaving one-tenth of his fortune to Frank, with the proviso that the remainder should also be his if he would double the one hundred thousand in some real-estate deal within one year.

At the time of his uncle's death Frank was employed as assistant purser by a company operating a line of coastwise steamers between New York and Southern ports. Upon receiving the news of the old man's illness he had hastened at once to his bedside, but the end came before his arrival.

The bequest had come as a great surprise, for his uncle had never shown him any favor or affection, and had often declared that no member of his family should ever receive a cent of his money. The will was dated a year before his uncle's death.

Six months had passed since he had come into possession of his inheritance, and Frank had begun to despair of ever fulfilling the condition that would enable him to claim the major portion of the estate. He had resigned his position and taken a suite of rooms in a Central Park West bachelor apartment-house, and spent the greater portion of his time there, studying drawings of land-plots and reading glowing descriptions of various properties that people in and about New York City had for sale.

Time and again he investigated certain lots of land that seemed likely to increase rapidly in value, only to decide later that they were not what he wanted. Months rolled by, and winter had come.

Frank rose early one morning, feeling refreshed and full of energy. He dressed himself and stood by a window that overlooked the Park. Outside, the ground was buried for fifteen inches beneath the snow, and a number of white-uniformed employees of the Street Cleaning Department were busily engaged in shoveling it into piles near the sidewalk, whence it was carted away.

It was Sunday, and the street was thronged with people out for a walk in the crisp wintry air or going to church. The snow had stopped falling and the sun shone brightly overhead.

Frank felt at peace with himself and all the world, and decided then and there that he would no longer worry about the condition laid down in his uncle's will.

"What's the use, anyway?" he asked himself. "With all due respect to my deceased uncle's memory, the old gentleman must have been crazy to make such a stipulation. How on earth did he ever expect me, with no knowledge of the real estate business, to make one hundred thousand dollars' profit on an investment of the same or a less amount in one year? The idea is preposterous and beyond all reason.

"I'll just give up all hope of ever getting another cent from the estate and content myself with what I have. It's ten times more than I ever expected to possess, and with a man of my moderate views of living will be ample." And Frank turned from the window, picked the Sunday Herald from the center-table, stretched himself out comfortably in a big armchair, and lighting a cigar, began to read.

As he lazily scanned the pages the following advertisement attracted his attention:

WANTED—By the New York Rifle Association, a perfectly level tract of land two thousand feet long by two hundred wide. Same must be within '

twenty miles of New York City and close to railroad station. To be used as a rifle-range. Will pay \$150,000 for suitable tract. Address all communications to R. C. WILDER, Treasurer N. Y. Rifle Association.

Now, Frank knew R. C. Wilder to be a very wealthy Wall Street broker who was an enthusiastic sportsman and a crack rifle-shot. He had participated in many of the events at Sea Girt, and had won a number of trophies there.

The New York Rifle Association was an organization composed of rich men, many of them millionaires several times over. The association could well afford to buy almost any piece of property that

suited their fancy.

The advertisement interested Frank particularly, because only the day before he had received a letter from a man who signed himself Rev. Archibald Stover offering him a tract of land for fifty thousand dollars that exactly filled the requirements of the rifle association.

In describing the property, the rev-"The tract erend gentleman wrote: contains thirty acres, more or less, the greater portion of the land being very The improvements consist of one large brick house containing twenty rooms. The house is a modern structure and is in excellent repair. It is built upon a hillside, and overlooks one of the most beautiful tracts of level land in New York State. Indeed, this level tract is really a freak of nature, being in direct variance with any other for miles around. Surrounded by hills, it is as flat as a floor, and is about two hundred feet wide and nearly twenty-five hundred long. The property is situated in Westchester County, within a quarter of a mile of the tracks of the New York Central Railroad."

The letter concluded with the statement that owing to ill health he, the Rev. Stover, was going to sail for Europe on the following Tuesday, and wished to dispose of the property not later than Monday, and for cash. The county records at White Plains would show that he held good titles to the land.

Frank laid down the Herald and gave

himself up to thought.

"Why not risk the fifty thousand dollars and buy the property?" he mused. Here was an opportunity that he had been waiting for for six months. Even if he didn't sell the land to the rifle association, the investment might be a good one. So, turning the matter over in his mind, he decided to buy, if the property was as described in the letter, and try to make the hundred thousand dollars on the deal, and by so doing comply with the requirements of the will.

Early the next morning, Frank breakfasted and started for Wall Street. Arriving there, he looked up Wilder's office, and entering, after some delay secured an interview with that gentleman.

Briefly stating the object of his visit, Frank was assured by the broker that the advertisement had been inserted by him in good faith, and that the association was ready to pay the cash for a location that suited them. Thanking Wilder for his courtesy, he left the office and hurried to his bankers.

Here he secured a certified check for fifty thousand dollars. Leaving the bank, he caught a Broadway car and went to his club.

Arriving there, he went into the billiard-room, and stood for a while watching a couple of acquaintances knock the balls around. At the conclusion of the game, he asked them, if not engaged for the afternoon, to accompany him on a trip into the country and witness the purchase of a piece of property.

Both the young fellows had heard of the strange provision of the will, and feeling a natural curiosity regarding it, at once assented. They felt that Frank was about to try for the remainder of the fortune, and gladly availed themselves of the opportunity to see the out-

come of the affair.

The three young men lunched together at the club, and afterward entered a cab and were driven to the Grand Central Station.

Here Frank purchased tickets for the three to White Plains, and, boarding the local, they soon arrived there.

White Plains is the seat of Westchester County, and going to the register's office, Frank quickly ascertained that the Rev. Archibald Stover really held good titles to the property that he wished to sell. The place was known as Hillside, and was formerly owned by an old lady

who had been a member of Stover's She had evidently thought a great deal of her pastor, for when she died she left him the property.

Stover had, soon after getting possession of the place, retired from the pulpit, declaring that his health was greatly impaired, and that rest and quiet were all that he required to restore it. He had taken up his abode at Hillside, and was seldom seen.

Frank had once met him at the home of a friend who introduced him to the preacher. He had taken an instinctive dislike to the man, and later, when Stover, who had evidently heard that Frank was on the lookout for real estate, had written him regarding Hillside, he had hardly considered the matter.

The Herald advertisement decided him, however, and putting away his repugnance for the individual, he decided to do business with him if the property

suited.

Leaving the court-house, the three went over to a livery-stable and engaged a sleigh and driver for the afternoon, and clambering in, were soon dashing quickly along the snow-covered road in the direction of Hillside.

After driving for half an hour, the party arrived at their destination.

As the sleigh drew up at the entrance to the grounds Frank mentally decided that a more unlikely place for a riflerange would be hard to find. High hills rose all around, and there was not a place twenty feet square in sight that appeared to be level, with the exception of the top of the railroad embankment that stretched along beside the wagon-

As the horses clambered up the driveway to the house the front door opened and the Rev. Stover appeared upon the

piazza.

"Get down and come into the house, Mr. Howard and gentlemen," he called out, recognizing Frank. "Driver, take the sleigh around to the barn and put the horses in. You'll find feed for them there," and coming down into the driveway, he grasped Frank cordially by the hand.

The young men who accompanied him were introduced to the ex-minister, and together the four entered the house.

"Now. Mr. Stover." said Frank. "I've come to look at the place with a view to purchasing, and if it suits me I can give you a certified check for the money at once, if you have the deed here. I must state candidly, though, that I am at a loss to understand where that level tract of land is that you described in vour letter."

The Rev. Stover chuckled gleefully. and rubbing his hands together before the fire that blazed in the open grate,

" Very good, Mr. Howard. I have the deed here and will at once show you over the place. My health is not at all good. and I have engaged passage and will sail for Paris to-morrow. If you want the property, you are just in time. As to that level piece of ground, you will certainly be surprised when you see it. It lies just over that hill directly behind the house," and rising, he invited his visitors to follow him and inspect the premises.

A thorough survey of the house and outbuildings was made, after which the party climbed the hill and gazed down

upon a most remarkable sight.

Below them, as level as a billiardtable, lay the land between the hills that almost entirely surrounded it. A slight break between them at either end of the length of the tract afforded the only entrance. A few bushes, bare of leaves, rose above the snow that covered it.

"I had all the trees cut down during the summer," explained Mr. Stover. "Now, if you gentlemen wish to go down there, we will make the attempt. Pretty rough climbing, though, you will

find it."

But darkness was rapidly creeping on, and Frank was thoroughly satisfied. He so informed Stover, who seemed greatly relieved and expressed his satisfaction, declaring that his health really did not permit his exerting himself in any way.

"Now, Mr. Howard, we will return to the house and conclude this business

if you are entirely satisfied."

Howard expressed his willingness, and within a few minutes the papers were signed that made Frank E. Howard, Jr., the undisputed owner of Hillside.

The business concluded, Frank and the young men with him shook hands with Stover, and calling the driver, were soon on their way back to White Plains. Arriving there, they boarded a train, and shortly afterward were in the city.

The next morning Frank called up the treasurer of the rifle association and informed him that he had a piece of property for sale that he thought would suit the association's purpose. Wilder said in reply that he would have the other officers of the association meet him and Frank at the Grand Central Station the next afternoon, and that they would all go out together and look at the property.

This program was carried out, and the next afternoon saw Frank repeating his

trip of two days before.

The weather had moderated considerably, and the roads were full of mud and slush, caused by the melting snow. When the party reached the house they did not stop to examine it then, but climbed up the hill, intending to inspect the level tract first.

As they neared the summit a peculiar roaring sound was heard, each minute becoming louder.

They reached the top of the hill and glanced over. Frank never forgot the sight that greeted them.

Where the beautiful level tract of supposed solid land had been two days before was now a mass of rapidly melting snow and slush, and through the very center of the rough gorge an angry torrent surged. An immense pile of rocks across the lower end showed how the stream had been dammed up. The water had frozen, and Frank's land was simply an artificial lake.

It is needless to say that the rifle association did not buy Hillside. Efforts were made to locate the ingenious Rev. Stover, but he was never apprehended.

· Later. Frank succeeded in selling the property to a syndicate, who turned it into a summer hotel. He got eighteen thousand dollars for it. Shortly afterward, a will dated three days before the death of Frank's uncle was found, and this document gave him the entire

But Frank has retired from the real estate business. He doesn't like it.

## THAT LITTLE LOCKED CASE.\*

BY CROMWELL KNOX.

Certain extraordinary experiences that fell to the lot of a business man in connection with an article he had never seen, but which he was credited with possessing.

#### CHAPTER XII.

ORMSBY TELLS A WONDROUS TALE.

ARTER sat back and caught his

"Millionaires! You mean to say that those bars-"

"I mean to say that those bars are worth more money than is in circulation in the United States to-day! That's what I mean to say! I mean to say that we can sell them to Benedict for a fortune, or we can keep them and make a dozen dozen fortunes!"

Ormsby sat down limply.

"Carter," he went on, "I give you my word, I had meant to sell them to the scoundrel, for safety's sake, for he'll hound a man to death if he tries to use

them. But now-now that they're there before us-I can't! It's too much money to throw away, even if we have to go about with a body-guard from now until the day we die!

"Man! Man! We could hire a hundred regiments and have them march with us all day! We could hire a thousand men to kill Benedict! We could have every man in his crowd slaughtered out of hand, no one ever the wiser! We could---"

"Ormsby!" Carter's voice broke in. "Stop! Are you mad? What under the sun are you talking about?"

Ormsby pulled up suddenly and stared about. For the first time, perhaps, he perceived Jordan and the detective; his face paled a trifle.

\*This story began in the October issue of The Argony. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

"Carter-I-the sight of them excited me so for the moment thatthat---"

"Both Mr. Jordan and this gentleman, who is a detective, know the whole story." Carter suggested.

"They do! But not-not-"

"Not the part you can tell, Ormsby." The other leaned forward.

"Send them away, Carter. I can't-I won't say a word until we're alone, but then I'll tell you every detail-so help

me!"

The senior partner bit his lips. Should he dismiss the two and risk whatever new development this Ormsby might choose to spring? Or should he insist that then and there, and in their · presence, the whole matter be cleared up?

He glanced covertly at Ormsby, and decided. The small man was very much

He waited, eving Carter impatiently, and it was plain that only behind locked doors would his tale be told.

"If you two will leave us for a mo-

ment or two," suggested Carter.

Slowly and unwillingly, Jordan and the detective walked out. Ormsby waited until the door had closed behind them; then he hitched his chair close to Carter and bent forward.

"Carter, the first thing, before I say a word, do you promise to share half and

half alike with me?"

"If there's anything to share."

"I have your promise?"

"You have."

Ormsby sat back with a sigh. He was more self-contained now, and seemed to be searching for a point at which to begin the story.

"It's a good long tale, Carter, and I'll have to leave out a great many things if we're going to-do what I hope

- to day."

"To-day?"

"Yes; there's no use in dallying about it. We'll have to skip out on any steamer that happens to be sailing tonight. It'll never be safe to work it here, and even Europe will be hot enough for us when Benedict gets on to the game!"

"But I'm not willing to leave the

country! My business,---"

"You won't think so much of your búsiness in a few minutes, man!" Ormsby smiled dryly. "Listen, Carter, what should you say that those bars were?"

"Silver? Aluminum?"

"You'd never guess in a thousand years. I myself don't know the composition, but I know what they can be made into."

"And that is?"

" Pure gold!"

"What!"

"Pure gold!" Ormsby repeated. "Oh, you may stare all you want to, Carter. I'm not insane, and this isn't ancient alchemy, by a long shot. up-to-date, modern scientific researchand this is where it has landed in Rathbone's hands, you see."

"But that stuff isn't gold!"

"Two hours will make it so, Carter -I know it, for I know almost the manner in which it's done."

"Ormsby, vour dreaming!"

"Were you dreaming yesterday—is all this wreckage a dream? Isn't there something behind all the excitement that you haven't been quite able to understand? Then don't say that I'm dreaming, Carter." He glanced at his watch. "Phew! It's getting late! You say you got those bars through the mail?"

"They were sent by the fellow who actually found them, yesterday—the one who inserted the advertisement. Here is

his letter."

"I'll read it later. The thing is that we have them, and that as soon as you've heard the details we're going to start out and make a fortune out of them. Carter, you never saw Rathbone before vesterday?"

" I never even heard of the man."

"Nor have many other people; but he's a great chemist and metallurgist. He never made a bid for fame, or even for a decent income, but for the greater part of his life he has been working toward those bars. His great dream has been the same great dream of thousands of others—to make gold artificially. Only Rathbone's dream didn't go by contraries, as they say-it came true!"

"You really know-

"Don't ask me how I know this or a

dozen other things. There's no time now to explain, but I do know them, as you'll see later. A month ago, Rathbone brought a little bar of gold to the assay office and sold it—and he had made it himself!"

"Great Scott!"

"It's the cold fact, Carter. Now for the details. There was a certain clique of men who had advanced Rathbone a little money at different times during the last ten or fifteen years. They didn't give him much, and they had less faith in his schemes, but for the sake of the gamble they doled him out a few thousands all told. Benedict is one of them, and the man with the money is none other than the multimillionaire—" Ormsby caught himself. "We'll let that pass for the present, Carter!

"Well, this was all some seven or eight years ago. Rathbone worked on and on, starving, and never accomplishing anything. He had made certain agreements with these people by which they were to have a certain big share in the discovery if they kept him running until the end of his experiments. They didn't, and the agreements were,

of course, all null and void.

"Just as it happened, they threw Rathbone over at the very worst time. He was—or imagined that he was—on the very verge of his discovery, and when the cash gave out so suddenly it literally threw him back for years.

"He was crazy! He came to the Benedict crowd, and cursed them, and begged for a little more money—and then cursed them again when he didn't get it! I was connected with the crowd at the time, in a certain capacity, so that I

know.

"For a week or so he was around every blessed day—sometimes twice in the course of the day. He'd beg and beg and beg, for he didn't want to go peddling his unmade discovery among moneyed people. The Benedict crowd were the only ones who knew anything about his workings, and he wanted them to stick to him until the end.

"But they wouldn't, and that settled it. They were done with Rathbone and all his crazy tinkering, and when he called attention to the agreements which had been made they simply laughed at him and told him that the whole thing was off, so far as they were concerned.

"Five or six thousands didn't matter to those men, but the lack of a good many more thousands mattered a great deal to Rathbone. He accepted the situation after a long while—and found that he couldn't go back to work on nothing.

"For a time, if I remember correctly, he had a position in one of the assaying laboratories down-town, here, and we supposed that he had forgotten all about the matter, or at least been forced to

drop it for good.

"One day, however, old Rathbone disappeared. Nobody knew where he had gone, and nobody cared a great deal, I suppose. At all events, Benedict and his people never thought it worth while to follow up the matter, until one day I met him—I'd left them long before—and told him that a prominent person down-town had written a check to Thomas Rathbone for ten thousand dollars. I knew that, for I had seen the check written—never mind just how.

"Benedict laughed at the time, and made light of the matter. Later on, I think, he laughed less, for it must have seemed that Rathbone was at work again, and that somebody was putting up the cash for his experiments. Perhaps they kept track of him in a quiet way; perhaps it was only chance; but the day that Rathbone sold that bar of gold, Benedict and his crowd knew all about it within three hours!"

"And so did you?" Carter inter-

posed shrewdly.

"And so did I," confessed Ormsby,
"for I saw the old man going into the
office, and I didn't hesitate at all about
following. In a very few minutes I was
morally certain that Rathbone had succeeded in the problem which has been
confounding men for untold ages.

"Well, sir, I was not particularly friendly to Rathbone, who hadn't treated me any too well, and I was not particularly friendly to the Benedict contingent, which had given me even worse treatment; and as for the present backer of Rathbone, I was not friendly at all to him, for I haven't even a nodding acquaintance with him.

"Not, of course, that I had any

earthly idea of making an attempt to come into this queer gold-mine, for I hadn't; but in a situation as remarkable as this there are all sorts of possibilities, and I thought it just as well to have an eye open. Indeed, I couldn't get the matter out of my head, and as there were a good many ways of gaining news, I used them all.

"First thing, I found that Benedict was hot-foot after Rathbone. His people, of course, claimed the right to their share in the discovery, as per the original agreements. Rathbone, naturally, didn't see it in just that light, and he indicated his views pretty plainly.

"Then Benedict-he's the biggest bully in existence—began putting on the screws. He was going to kill Rathbone, and he would have done it but for the fact that the discovery wouldn't be much use without all the details. Then he was going to do this and that and the other thing, until the poor old man was in a state of terror.

"He didn't dare go out alone, and he didn't dare see the people who had been backing him-and it was only, I believe, with a good deal of difficulty that he succeeded in communicating with them at all without Benedict's knowledge.

"However, he did accomplish it, and all the details were arranged. Risky as it was in one way, Rathbone destroyed almost every blessed note he had ever made on the subject. He made three small bars of the compound he had worked out-and there they are!"

"But they are not gold!"

"Of course they're not, but they need only to be smelted with a certain preparation which constitutes the bulk of Rathbone's discovery and the molecular structure is broken up and reformed into that of gold!"

"Ormsby!"

"It's a fact, as you shall see in a very few moments, now. Everything was out of the way, save only the contents of that case. That was all that Rathbone needed. I have it authoritatively that if he even succeeded in forgetting the manner in which those bars were made as they are almost any good chemist could make an analysis and duplicate them. The main secret lies in the compound with which they are to be smelted.

"Yesterday morning, as it had all been planned out, Rathbone was to go to the office of the people who had kept him running, deliver the case, and then disappear. After a while they would start a little plant somewhere in the backwoods and go to manufacturing

"Oh, not enough to flood the market and cheapen the product, but just enough to keep a few comfortable millions flowing into their pockets-month after month, year after year, decade after decade! Carter!" Ormsby burst out, "did you ever hear of such a proposition? They could not lose to save their lives! Their wealth was limited only by what they chose to make the limit!"

"It is-it's the most tremendous

"And we've got it! We've got itthat's the best part of the whole affair! Well-the rest you know, or have guessed. Rathbone shook us off-Benedict and I were both on the lookout for him. We learned that he had gone down here and had walked five or six blocks along Front Street and then turned up toward the west side of town. when, a block apart, I trailed Benedict down here, what did we see but old Rathbone staggering back, his eyes the size of saucers and fixed dejectedly on the ground.

"Somehow, I knew it by instincthe'd lost his little black case, at which, by the way, I'd managed to get a squint, and he was going along here in search of it! Then came the advertisementand you know the rest. It was very unlikely that two little locked black cases had been lost along here at just that time, more particularly as the initials were on top and in gilt. The box was an old leather case which Rathbone had brought from England years ago-it used to hold some of his delicate scien-

tific instruments."

Ormsby leaned back and drew breath again from his hurried narrative. Carter rubbed his chin-it still was a little beyond him.

"So that you believe---"

"I don't believe a thing in connection with what I've told you-I know every last word to be the solemn gospel truth!"

"That we have the secret of making

artificial gold?"

"That we have that and nothing else. Come, Carter. There'll be hours of time in which I can spin the whole yarn and explain everything. That's the outline, and it's all you need to know for the present. We'd better be moving on."

"But where?"
"Europe."

"My dear man, I can't drop everything and leave the country like that!

Why, it's---"

"Carter, don't you realize what you're leaving it for? Don't you see that in a year—or six months—you'll be able to come back here and buy out all New York if we manage things properly?"

"Well, it might be possible——" Carter smiled tolerantly, but he felt his

face flushing.

The gold-fever, old as gold itself, was getting into his blood. If Ormsby spoke the truth, what couldn't be done!

Wild as it seemed at first glance, anything would be possible to them in a little while even one-tenth of his

prophecy came true.

And still—it was so utterly crazy in every particular! And so utterly fascinating in its very madness! Carter made a strong effort at regaining his calmer senses.

"Ormsby, it may all be as you believe. I can't, to save me, assimilate all this amazing story at once and credit it with being the truth; but it may be, for all that, and if it is, I'm not the man to—to——"

"To let a hundred—or a thousand—millions slide! I should hope that you

were not!"

"So tell me exactly what you propose to do."

Ormsby hitched in his chair.

"Do? Why, get out of the country, first of all. Then make for the far-back regions of Germany—the Bavarian Alps or the Black Forest, or even go farther away. Once there, we'll find a way of getting the material we need and building a plant for smelting. I'm an engineer, and so are you. After that, the rest is easy."

"And all—all we need is this little case with its three metal bars—that is

all that we shall require?" Carter almost stammered before the enormity of the proposition.

"And a few thousand dollars, which either you or I can furnish," supplemented Ormsby, "and, of course, the paper."

"Paper? What paper?"

"Why, the sum total of all Rathbone's notes—the folded paper which you found underneath the bars."

Carter gripped the arms of his chair and groaned; not until that very minute had he quite realized the strength of the gold-fever's grip—not until the precious metal seemed to be slipping away from him.

"Is that paper vital?"

"Vital! Ît's the whole thing! Why? It isn't——"

The senior partner's trembling hand held out the typewritten letter which had accompanied the case.

"The fellow who opened that case yesterday evening," he said huskily, "managed to lose the paper!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

A BLOW AND A DECISION.

Ormsby's expression was almost beyond analysis.

Amazement, horror, disappointment, rage—all were mingled; he fairly glowered at Carter. Then, after a moment or two, his face flushed and pure anger gleamed from his eyes.

"I see!" said Ormsby significantly.

Carter was looking moodily at him. In the face of that other shock, he had not quite perceived the train of Ormsby's thought.

"It's the deuce!" he said weakly.

" Why-----'

Ormsby suddenly shook an angry fist in his face.

"Stop!" he commanded. "Stop right there, Carter!"

" Eh?"

"Oh, you're not dealing with a child. I've as good a head as the next fellow—and you're paying me a mighty poor compliment in assuming that I haven't."

"Ormsby, what in thunder are you

talking about?"

"It was clever, fast enough-very

clever indeed, my friend, but it won't work in this case! You've picked out the wrong man for such a trick, and you'll learn it, too, a little later!"

Carter was stiffening.

"My good man," he said coldly, "if you'll kindly explain, we may be able to understand each other. If you're going to talk in as wild a fashion as—well, as the gold yarn you've just been telling me——"

"()h, you're sneering at that now, are you?" snarled the little man. "It won't go, Carter! You want me to explain, do you? All right, I'll do it, and in a very few words at that. You contemptible cur, you've got that paper locked up somewhere in this office!"

"I-what!"

"You've got that paper locked up within a dozen feet of us now. It may be in your pocket, for all I know, but it's here!"

"I tell you it's not!"

"And I tell you it is! You were very sharp, weren't you? You contrived to get the bulk of the story out of me with your little confidence game, and you certainly succeeded. But if you think you're going to be left in peace to use what you know you're making the biggest mistake of your life! I'll sell you out to Benedict himself, first!"

Carter, flushing for a moment, leaned forward with a smile that was partly exasperation and partly tolerance.

."See here, Ormsby; in this remarkable business you seem to be going off the track as easily as all the rest. I tell you that I haven't the paper, and that I have never seen it. Read this letter, which came in the last mail, and then ask yourself whether, had I wished to conceal the case, it would have been lying here open on my desk when you entered."

Even to the excited Ormsby, the truth rang in the other's words. The visitor took the letter, almost unwillingly, as it seemed, and ran rapidly to the post-script.

When he returned it, his expression

was perplexed.

"Carter," he said, "I—oh, hang it! I'm almost inclined to believe it's so!"

"Thank you."

"I do believe it, for that matter, but

—oh, give me your word that the paper wasn't in the case when you received it!" He glanced at Carter's angry face and stammered on: "Here! I beg your pardon, Carter. I'll believe it without that—but I'm about three-quarters insane with this business, I suppose!"

"It's quite enough to send the ordinary mortal to the asylum," the senior

partner agreed.

"So, it's gone!" muttered the other. "Gone—the Lord only knows where! Why, Carter, that paper, to my almost positive knowledge, contained all the information necessary to convert these bars into gold!"

"And yet Rathbone stuffed them into the case together, and even carried them in a pocket where they could be lost!"

"It's his preoccupied way," sighed Ormsby. "His head would have been gone long before this if nature hadn't fastened it pretty firmly. Rathbone's all science and nothing else, but—what on earth are we going to do?"

The senior partner frowned thought-

fully.

"Frankly, I don't know, Ormsby. This remarkable affair has confused me too much to allow of any amount of coherent thinking. The paper——"

"May be blowing around any particu-

lar street in New York!"

"Or may have been gathered up by the Street Cleaning Department!"

"Or may be in the hands of some one who is puzzling over what on earth it may mean," added Ormsby, hopelessly. "At any rate, it isn't here, where it's needed, and it contains everything that makes the possession of the bars important."

"There is no other copy?"

" No."

"Are you certain of that, Ormsby?"

"Absolutely so."

Carter shook his head.

"These bars—you were saying that almost any competent chemist would be able to find out what they contained."

"It would be, I understand, a very complicated and difficult process, and one admitting a great many possibilities of error; but a good man could do it, nevertheless."

"Then why not submit one of them to a good chemist and find out just what

they contain and how they could be covery is useless. Also, his head con-

"Perfectly simple," agreed Ormsby, with a dry smile, "but what would be the good of it?"

"Simply that we should know---

"What was in the bars—yes. But would your 'good chemist' be able to tell us the further steps necessary to convert them into gold, Carter?"

The senior partner sighed.

"That's true."

"As the matter stands, then, we have the bars, and we can learn pretty accurately what they are whenever we like and that's all the good it will do us, so far as I can see."

"Rathbone, then? Has he any more of this metallic stuff?"

"Not a bit."

"Can he duplicate it?"

"That," said Ormsby, "is something which, candidly, I don't quite understand myself. I believe not. I believe that to go ahead with his practical production of the stuff he must have some sort of sample of what he has already made, for analysis and comparison."

"And we hold the supply."

"We have that, at least, Carter."

The senior partner leaned back and regarded the ceiling thoughtfully.

"Ormsby!"
"Well?"

"What sort of person is this Rathbone?"

"A scientist—lock, stock, and barrel. That's about all. He's an investigative machine pure and simple."

"I meant, what sort of man is he to deal with—reasonable or otherwise?"

"Well, he's a crank, from all that I have ever seen. I presume that he's all right if you handle him properly."

"And can you handle him properly?"

" Eh?"

"He has nothing against you, has he? He'd listen to reason from you sooner than he would from a stranger?"

"He—well, probably," said Ormsby. "What have you in mind, Carter? The same proposition that has been occurring to me in the past ten or fifteen minutes?"

"Very likely. As I see it, we have the whole available supply of this gray alloy without which Rathbone's dis-

covery is useless. Also, his head contains the information without which the metal itself is useless. The conclusion's pretty obvious, isn't it?"

"Sort of a community of interests?"

"Exactly. If matters stand as we suppose, why shouldn't Rathbone be willing to share with us? We give him the metal only on condition that we participate in the proceeds."

"You forget the people who have been backing him. Rathbone isn't one

to turn on them."

"What of it? They'll get absolutely nothing unless we appear with the metal. Why shouldn't' we see them, too, if necessary, and make terms with them as well?"

Carter's eyes were shining again, now; he saw the way ahead to the gold, and the fever had taken new possession of him.

Ormsby stared at the floor for a minute or two.

"You're right, Carter. It's the only thing to do, and we'll have to do it. Rathbone'll go mad when he finds that the bars are in our possession and that the paper has been lost—but we'll be able to handle him somehow."

Carter was on his feet.

"Where is the man?"

"You want to see him at once?"

"There is no time like the present, is there?"

"I suppose not, although I should have liked a little chance for consideration before we tackled him. However, you're correct enough, Carter. Benedict might turn his energies on Rathbone again if anything should point him in that direction, and even kill the poor old chap if he saw fit!"

"Then come, man!"

The senior partner could hardly stand still; Ormsby's recent calm broke down, too, and he leaped from his chair.

"Well, take your coat, Carter, and we'll be off. But—oh, Lord! I wish that

idiot hadn't lost the paper!"

The senior partner rang for Jordan, left word that he would not return before the morrow, and dismissed the amazed youth without further information.

He picked up his light overcoat, snapped the case together, and dropped.

it into his pocket. He turned back to Ormsby with a light almost wild in his eyes, and found the light reflected in the other's face. The two were setting out to capture the greatest gold-supply in the world!

At the door, Carter, who had lately learned caution, thrust out his head. As quickly, he drew it back and thrust Ormsby behind him.

"That—that infernal rascal!"

"Not Benedict?"

"The very same," whispered the senior partner. "As sure as we're standing here, he's watching this office in person!"

Very cautiously, Ormsby leaned for-

ward.

"You're" right, Carter!" he said.
"He's there, and he has his eye fixed on the place. Only your brass sign prevented his seeing me then!"

"But what can he want now?"

"Simply to keep tabs on you, I presume. He can hardly know that I am here, for he certainly wasn't in the neighborhood when I arrived, and I have lately cultivated a habit of looking for the gentleman everywhere. But there he is—and the question seems to be: How are we going to pass him without his knowledge, Carter?"

Carter smiled a little.

"Well, it's going to create a little curiosity if we are seen by any of the employees, Ormsby, but we'll go this way."

He led the way to the rear of the corridor, and quietly opened a door leading to the cellar. He fumbled for the switch and turned on the incandescents, and the cellar was illuminated.

A glance behind assured him that no one was watching; Carter quietly closed the door again behind them and de-

scended the stairway.

As the disgraced officer had left that morning, so did Carter and Ormsby leave in the afternoon. The cellar was long, and the far end gave exit upon an alley by which the side street could easily be reached.

The exit was neither cleanly nor dignified, but at least it was beyond the ken of the ubiquitous Benedict. One quick survey at the corner served to verify that fact, and both men chuckled.

"Where now?" asked Carter.

"Straight ahead. Rathbone's away at the top of a little old frame shack on the west side."

Ormsby struck off briskly, and Carter

fell silently into step beside him.

The senior partner's legs were long, the other's short. As a consequence, Ormsby saved his breath and neglected to talk, and as another consequence, Carter's mind fell to going over the remarkable events of the past day and night.

Hardly twenty-four hours back, he had been the sane, conventional business man, with good business head, well-equipped office, trim home, and good, solid prospects. The Crane's Falls contract and his work thereon were absorb-

ing all his time and thought.

Now! He hadn't given Crane's Falls a thought for hours, despite the fact that it was the biggest plum their firm had ever caught! His office was absolutely a wreck, and he wasn't even thinking of it! His home was another dire wreck, and he had forgotten it completely!

Here at Ormsby's side he was striding away from all his former existence to capture the mad old secret of making

gold!

They had traversed some ten blocks, when Ormsby's voice suddenly brought him back from his reverie.

"That's the place, Carter!"

The senior partner looked in the direction of the pointing finger. The building was indeed a relic of other days. The four stories of wood looked almost ready to totter and fall.

One or two dingy signs ornamented the windows here and there; other windows held grimy notices of "Room to

Let."

"In there?"

"Yes, at the top of the house, and in the back. It's the very place for such a job as Rathbone's, I suppose. There are only a couple of other tenants in the building, and they're down-stairs."

"It's a queer old place!"

"And Rathbone's quarters are in the queerest part—the half-story in the back. Why, you have almost to climb a ladder to get to him."

Ormsby paused at the door and

looked up and down the street. Fortunately, in the late afternoon the trucking was over for the day and the street clear.

"Well, none of Mr. Benedict's crowd are in the neighborhood, at any rate," muttered Ormsby. "Or if they are, they're well out of sight. Come along, Carter, and prepare for a climb."

Through the lower hall they walked, and to the stairway at the rear, then up the rickety steps to the floor above.

It was a steep climb and a breathless one, for the dark old halls seemed devoid of air as they were of light. At the third landing Carter paused for breath.

"Suppose he's not there?" he in-

quired softly.

"He'll be there, fast enough; Rathbone hasn't been outside the place for years, except when it was absolutely necessary, Carter. If he should happen to be away, we'll wait—that's all."

"And when we do meet him?"

"Leave it to me. It'll be the devil's own job at best, but I believe that I shall be able to handle him." He shrugged his shoulders. "It'll be tough, for we can't threaten him with violence or anything of the sort. The old rascal knows just how precious his life is to every one concerned. But we've got the bars, and we'll work it!"

He led the way again, and they attained the fourth floor. Here they came upon a closed door, the key in the lock.

"Luck! Dutch luck!" chuckled Ormsby. "Go ahead, Carter. I'll lock the door behind us, and none of us will leave until negotiations are completed—and nobody'll interrupt!"

Carter stepped inside and waited for Ormsby to follow. The little man stepped upward, paused, and turned the key, and patted the senior partner on the back.

"Now for it! Now for it, Carter!

"Phew! It's hot enough here!"

"Rathbone's furnace; he has it going most of the time, and it kicks up a grand old temperature."

They were before the upper door now. Carter turned, and in a voice almost trembling, whispered:

"Shall I knock?"

"Knock? I guess not! Walk in,

and if the door's locked we'll smash it in, if necessary!"

The senior partner gathered himself and laid a hand on the knob. It turned quite easily, and the door opened.

Into their faces burst a great swirl of dense yellow smoke, and in the gloom behind rose the red glare of flame! Rathbone's laboratory was ablaze!

### CHAPTER XIV.

### THE END OF THE AFFAIR.

To the unaccustomed, there is something distinctly awesome about fire.

For the moment, Carter and Ormsby clutched each other in an absolute paralysis of fear; but after a second or two, as the first gust of smoke drew out through the skylight above the stairs, it became apparent that their immediate danger was not quite so great.

The room was big and bare, save for the multitude of scientific fittings, and the fire seemed to be mainly at the far end. How much time it might consume in creeping across one could hardly tell.

"My God!" were the first words from Carter's lips. "The whole place is going, Ormsby!"

The other was regaining his wits rapidly.

"Going like sin, too!" he assented.

"Here!" cried Carter. "Where are you bound, man?"

"Inside! It'll be safe enough for another minute or two, Carter—and he may be there!"

"Rathbone?"

"Yes, and if he is-"

Another volume of smoke rolled over them, and the crackling went on fiercely as the fresh air entered. On the threshold, Ormsby crouched low and peered under the dense pall.

"By thunder! Carter. He's in there on the floor! He's been overcome by smoke, and he's lying on his face!"

"Shall we--"

"Not we. I'm going in after him, and if I get him to the door in that smoke it'll be all I shall do. You stay here; don't breathe in any more than you can help, and if I can get him this far, you take hold and drag him downstairs as fast as you can!"

"But, man! Think what you're go-

ing into!"

"And think what I'm going after!" cried Ormsby wildly. "The future gold-supply of the world is going to burn up in there unless we drag it out!"

He paused for the merest instant and wrung Carter's hand; perhaps there was a strong suspicion in Ormsby's mind that he might not emerge at all, with Rathbone or without.

Then he was gone!

Carter, on the step, waited and quivered with excitement. He could see little or nothing, for the fire was raging now where it had blazed a few minutes back.

The smoke poured out unceasingly; the heat became intense. Carter choked and waited.

Out of the gray terror a hail reached

"Carter! Carter!"

" Hello!"

"Come in here!"

"Where?"

"Middle of the room! He's too heavy—I can't move him! Hurry up,

man, or I'll have to skip!"

All in an instant, a flashing picture crossed Carter's mind—his home, his wife, his friends and relatives, Joyce, the office—and then he had dropped his overcoat and dashed into the smoke.

"Where are you now?"
"Here! Phew!"

The flame fairly scorched Carter, but he followed the voice; and presently, almost at his feet, came another hail.

"Drop flat!"
"Why?"

"There's not so much smoke down here, and I want you to have a look at him, Carter. He——"

The senior partner was on his knees now—and he cried aloud in horror at

the sight which met his eyes.

There, indeed, was Rathbone, but—dead! Or was he dead? The lips were blue and the cheeks ghastly white. No sign of fluttering was visible about the chest or the lips.

Horror-stricken, the senior partner looked up, to meet the eyes of Ormsby

through the haze.

"What is it?" the little man called hoarsely.

" I--wait!"

Carter bent low and placed an ear above the prostrate man's heart. With an immense effort, he ignored the crackling and the roar of the flames, shut out the swirl of red smoke above him, and listened.

And then, with a quick nod, he looked up again:

"He's dead, Ormsby!"

" Dead!"

"As dead as——"

Ormsby started up.

"Then he's beyond helping us, Carter, and in a minute or two we'll be beyond helping ourselves! Look!"

Across the room, the flickering red light shone out more brilliantly for an instant. Above them appeared a bright flash, and then a newer light—the sun!

There was a roar as the flames soared through the aged roof, and a deafening crash as the burned timbers dropped to the blazing floor.

"By thunder! She's going!" gasped

Carter half stupidly.

"Yes, and a part of the floor went through that time, too! Ah! That's the cause, is it?"

"What?"

"The gas-furnace—it's overturned. The old man must have lighted it and fallen across it. Come, Carter!"

The senior partner shook himself together. The place was intolerably hot now, and the smoke unbearable; it was only with great exertion that he followed Ormsby across the floor.

But at the door conditions were a little better. The smoke, pouring to the skylight, was not quite so impenetrable, and the heat had lessened a little.

But their plight was desperate, and a hasty exit down through the old fire-trap was in order.

Ormsby was dashing down the smokefilled stairway now—his hand was on the key. Carter was upon him, and

"Hurry! Hurry!" burst from his

lips.

"She's sticking!"

He gave another violent twist.

"She's broken off short!"

"What?"

"The key, man! the key!" Ormsby cried excitedly.

"But you unlocked it!"

"I didn't, though—the wretched thing broke off before I could turn it!"

For an instant they stared at each other. Ormsby turned and ran back to the top of the stairway and threw open the little window. His head went out and his voice roared:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

He returned quickly to Carter.

"I thought we could make the next roof from there," he said grimly. "We can't—there's nothing but a six-foot alleyway!"

"And we're locked in here!"

" Ves ! "

"With the fire creeping a foot nearer every minute and that poor wretch's body up there!"

Ormsby was calmer now—and far the

calmer of the two.

"We've got possibly five minutes to think things over, Carter. If any one arrives and breaks down that door before then we've a chance. If not well——"

"We'll get about what we deserve,"

said Carter bitterly.

"I don't know that we deserve it, but we'll get what many another man has succeeded in getting when he grew greedy for too much gold."

The senior partner turned and hurled himself against the door. It held wonderfully. He stepped upward and leaped at it again, and Ormsby caught him by

the arm.

"That isn't any use, you know. The door was made to Rathbone's order, for the particular purpose of shutting out people, and if you'll look closer you'll see that it's braced with iron from end to end. The hinge is a single rod, and you couldn't smash it if you pounded it all day."

"But, man, think!"

"I'm thinking—faster than I ever thought in my life before, and I know just where we stand, Carter. If we're let out in the next few minutes we'll get clear. If not——"

"We'll roast."

"That's not a very pleasant way to put it, Carter, but it's the truth," sighed Ormsby.

Carter shut his teeth and looked above. Ormsby crouched on the stairway and kept his face to the steps, where there was still a little air to breathe.

The fire was roaring furiously above them now. At intervals great gusts of flame swept across the laboratory, darted through the doorway for an instant, and dropped back into the smoke-clouds again. The heat was agonizing, the showers of blazing embers and glowing sparks that rained down upon them were more than frightful.

Silently, pantingly, the two men beat painfully at the little glowing points as they landed upon the inflammable clothing; silently, they strove for breath.

Five minutes had passed away now. Above, even the doorway was blazing; the mighty flame-roar had swelled until their heads sung and vibrated with the dreadful sound. Their hair was crinkling with the intense heat, their hands smarting past endurance.

In a very little while, now, 'Carter thought, the end would be here—and

such an end!

But even as he thought it—even as he was on the point of turning to the man at his side to say good-by—a crash came upon the door.

Ormsby started up, electrified.
"It can't be! So soon! Carter!"

The crash was repeated, and another came, and another and another. Through the planking, something bright appeared and vanished again. Another blow, and it came straight through.

Carter and Ormsby beheld the blessed

gleam of a fire department ax!

Ormsby dragged back his companion; the blows rained on, and the door fell in. They leaped above it, and outward; they were greeted with a shout of amazement from the rubber-coated group in the glowing hallway.

A fireman dashed past them and upward, a long hose-nozzle over his shoulder, and dashed back again as quickly, as the topmost stair clattered inward, a

blazing ruin.

"No go! She's all gone up there!" Then strong arms seized the two dazed men, and they stumbled along to the commands:

"Here! Front! Ladders!"

When very old buildings burn, they have a way of burning completely, and

the best efforts of the department, as a rule, are put forth in preventing a spread of the flames.

So it was in this case. Not half an hour after the start of the fire, the wretched structure which had once held the Rathbone laboratory, the building which had seen the realization of an ages-old dream, was a smoking, steam-

ing pile of black char.

They had carried Carter and Ormsby to the street, for at the ladders both men had promptly collapsed. When an ambulance surgeon had worked over them for a little, however, they returned to consciousness and a fair degree of strength, and, all argument and reasoning to the contrary, they returned to the fire.

For a while they gazed at the utter ruin without speaking. Ormsby was the first to voice his sentiments, and they came in an optimistic tone:

"Well, the poor old chap's done for,"

he sighed. "But-

"But what?" asked Carter curiously.

"But our hopes are not."

"Our hopes? Hopes of what?"

"Of using his discovery, of course. We still have the bars, you know, and what one man has done another can do. It's not impossible that some chemist may be able——"
"Ormsby," said Carter softly, "where

are the bars?"

"Where-why! I don't know! You had them when we went in there, Car-

ter, and-"

"And they were in the pocket of my light overcoat!" said the other. "And when you called to me from that blazing hell I dropped it and ran in!"

"And you didn't find it again?"

"I never gave the bars or the case another thought, Ormsby. They burned up, together with poor old Rathbone and his laboratory."

"And they're gone-gone!"

"As completely as if they had never existed," said Carter.

The little man gazed blankly at Carter, and was astonished to see a smile of sheer relief.

"They're gone," Carter repeated. "and I'm thoroughly glad of it. They never could have brought other than trouble to you and me-and perhaps to all the rest of the world in time."

"But consider-"

Ormsby fell silent, his sentence uncompleted. Carter glanced around them.

The excitement was all over now. Enginemen were tending their fires; the men from the hose-carriages were gathering the long lines and folding them neatly back in the carts; the fire chief and the police sergeant were conferring not far off; the crowd was slowly returning to its concerns.

Carter suddenly laid a hand on the

other's shoulder.

"They're gone, Ormsby!" he said, rather loudly. "Rathbone, his bars, his secret-all of them are gone together. I'm glad of it! Little as you or I would have thought of dropping such a proposition, I'm sincerely happy now to know that neither you nor I nor any one else in this world will ever make one cent out of the discovery!"

A snort sounded behind them. Ormsby turned quickly; then seized Carter's

"Did you see him?" he whispered.

Carter glanced over his shoulder toward a broad figure that was pushing its way through the crowd in the direction of the open street.

"Benedict?" he said, with a smile.
"Yes, Ormsby, I saw him. That last speech was for his benefit solely, andthank Heaven!-he seemed to believe

The little man stared vacantly after the departing man. Carter waited for a minute or two, then laid a hand on his

"We'd better part here, Ormsby," he. said. "What with refitting a home and an office "-in his relief he could even smile now at the prospect-" I've plenty to look after. Going to shake hands? I'll leave you now, for I believe I'll take the night train and tell the whole remarkable story to my partner, who's up-

"And thank the Lord," sighed Carter, as he dropped the other's limp hand and left him standing still in the watersoaked street, "that I can tell him, too, that the affair of the little black case is

ended!"

# RUNNING WILD.

### BY W. HANSON DURHAM.

A railroad story about an express messenger who this time, by way of novelty, does something besides defending his car from robbers.

HAULING the through express, and bound by government contract to deliver Uncle Sam's mail-bags at Davis Junction on connecting time, Number Forty-Seven, the fast flier of the road, was not supposed even to hesitate at Humboldt. This was a little flag-station on the K. and M., but Death cares little for time-schedules or railroad regulations, and Number Forty-Seven not only stopped, but actually lingered a few minutes-long enough for Danny Reynolds to climb quickly down out of the cab, bolt headlong into the little shanty, and cry loudly to the astonished

"Get a doctor—quick! Jerry's dead or dying! Wire headquarters

orders!"

With that he whirled about and dashed for the cab, followed by the confused conductor and trainmen. gether they lifted the form of the stricken engineer and bore him tenderly into the baggage-room.

As Danny stood over him for an instant, the station-agent hurried along the platform and shoved a yellow trainorder into his hand. Danny opened it,

and hastily read:

HEADQUARTERS. TRAIN-DESPATCHER'S OFFICE. Take first engineman available and complete run.

"Blazes!" ejaculated Danny, as he scanned the order. "What do they think—that we have got spare engineers hanging around this God-forsaken place, or do they expect me to run her in and shovel my own coal?"

He glanced helplessly up at Number Forty-Seven, which stood hissing and blowing impatiently, and then at the row of heads and faces protruding wonderingly from the long string of carwindows stretching back along the track.

"Dunno!" returned the station-agent,

shaking his head. "There h'ain't engineer in the place—except old Kelly, there," and he nodded his head toward a blear-faced, rum-sodden wreck of a man who slouched across the road and joined the crowd gathering about the little station.

"What's the matter with you running her in yourself? I guess I can find a man to fire for you," suggested the sta-

tion-agent suddenly.

"We are behind now," replied Danny shortly. "No green man can keep her hot enough to make it up. What's the matter with Kelly-he's sober now, ain't he?"

"I dunno," answered the stationagent doubtfully. "You don't want

him, anyway."

"Well, drunk or sober, he's the only engineman available. Call him over."

The station-agent turned and caught the shifting eye of the old ex-engineer and beckoned to him. With slow, shuffling steps the man crossed the plat-

form and stood beside them.

"See here, Kelly," began the stationagent hurriedly. "You see how things are here. Jerry's down and out, and the train is two minutes late now. Can you take Jerry's place and get her in on time? She's your old engine—Forty-Seven, you know. What do you say?" urged the agent nervously. "Can you do it?"

The ex-engineer raised his bleary eves and scanned the pulsing, steam-hissing monster beside him, then replied slowly as he run his hand along her polished

parallel.

"Yes, sir, I can do it. I've done it many times afore now, and I can do it to-day. I'm as good a man as I ever was, but the K. and M. don't think

"All right," exclaimed the agent. "Jump up quick, and for God's sake keep sober and-"

But Kelly had already swung himself into the cab close behind Danny, who seized the bell-cord and begun pulling it vigorously. With still shaking but practised hand Kelly tried a steam-gage here and there, glanced quickly at the air and water gages, then, at the signal from the impatient conductor, he pulled open the throttle carefully, notch by notch, with a skill and touch which caused the heavy train to glide easily and steadily away from the little station and gather headway and fast-increasing speed at every pulsation of the engine.

Inside the express-car, with its square blind end to the tender, Haskell, the Wells & Fargo express messenger, sat checking off his entries in his routebook. The door at the farther end opened, and Burrell, the conductor of Number Forty-Seven, entered, and

seated himself wearily.

"Dick," he began slowly, "what day of the week is it?"

The messenger looked up quickly and replied:

"Friday. Why?"

"Friday. And what date?" continued the conductor, gazing at the other steadily.

The messenger made no reply, but glanced at the calendar suspended over his desk on the opposite side of the car, and then replied:

"The thirteenth!"

"Correct," commented Burrell slowly.
"Friday, the thirteenth, and old Jerry's gone. We left him back there at Humboldt in the care of a doctor. Apoplexy, I guess. Danny worked her in from—"

"Who's running her now—Danny?" interrupted Haskell carelessly, as he

continued checking off his list.

"No. Danny called for orders, and they wired him to take the first engineer in sight and run her in, and he's got old Kelly up there in Jerry's place."

".Humph!" grunted Haskell shortly.

"Drunk or sober?"

He was familiar with the habits of a Kelly, who had been hired and fired from time immemorial or account of his skill and judgment when sober and utter disregard for rules or regulations at any other time, and who was now a palsied wreck of what had once been the best engineman of the K, and M.

"He's been drunk as a lord for a week," replied Burrell quickly. "I don't know how he is to-day. He's had the horrors once or twice already, and—"

"God!" ejaculated Haskell vehemently, "I hope he won't have 'em again to-day. If he does, we are as good as ditched now."

"It was a mighty risky thing to take him on, anyway," returned the conductor nervously. "But what else could

we do after those orders?"

"Well," commented Haskell slowly, as he tossed aside his book, "I'll be glad when we get into the Junction. Friday always has been my unlucky day, and it's being the thirtcenth on top of that makes it a double hoodoo, to say nothing of our having a past-graduate of the horrors at the throttle."

As he spoke there came a deafening blast from the whistle and a sudden increase of speed in the train. The car began to lurch and sway from side to side in an altogether unusual manner.

"What's the matter now?" cried Haskell, as they both sprang to their

feet.

"Nothing, I guess," the conductor reassured him. "We lost several minutes back there at Humboldt, and I guess Kelly is trying to make it up now that we have got a straight track all the way into Glenfells."

As he spoke he fumbled with one hand for his watch, and looking at it without a word, he lurched across to the nearest window and glanced quickly out at the maze of flying fields and woods. Then there came a panoramic flash of houses and the loud, quick clanking of switch-irons.

"What's this mean?" he cried excitedly. "Here we are at Glenfells. Why don't he stop? We pass the freight here, and—" But his words were lost in another shriek from the

whistle.

Haskell turned quickly about and made his way down the length of the lurching car, closely followed by the excited conductor. Grasping at the iron bars across the little window, he steadied himself and looked out straight ahead

into the cab of the engine, and his heart grew suddenly sick with fear and ap-

prehension at what he saw.

There, perched up on the engineer's seat, was the form of Kelly, with one hand hard on the throttle, which he held wide open. On the other side of the cab was the limp and huddled form of Danny, lying motionless in a pool of blood.

In a flash Haskell understood.

"He's drunk!" gasped Burrell over his shoulder. "He's killed the fireman, and we're head on for the freight now. We ought to have passed it on the siding back at Glenfells. We're running ahead of our own time now."

As he spoke he yanked desperately at the bell-cord overhead, but it resulted only in a quick, mocking response from the whistle and a spurt of still greater speed. They heard Kelly laugh loudly as he glanced back in their direction, and they caught the gleam of unreasoning light in his eyes.

"My God!" exclaimed Burrell, wildly. "He's got the horrors! Look at him! It's all over with us," and he glared helplessly ahead into the cab.

For a moment neither spoke. They saw Kelly suddenly slide from his seat and shove the senseless form of Danny aside with his foot. Then he seized the shovel and swung open the door of the fire-box to throw in shovelful after shovelful of coal.

"We can't get into the cab, and something has got to be done," ejaculated Burrell anew. "And that mighty sudden. It's his life or ours and all the rest behind. What do you say—shall I do it?"

As he spoke he drew his revolver and leveled it through the little end window at the swaying form of the frenzied en-

gineer, twenty feet ahead.

Haskell saw and understood, but he quickly pushed aside the weapon and cried: "What's the use of that? If you killed him he'd probably drop and leave the throttle wide open and she'd run for miles yet. He has just filled the fire-box."

Burrell made some muttered protest, and then, evidently realizing the truth of the situation, he dropped his weapon unheeded to the floor and reeled back to sink into a chair. He covered his face with his hands and groaned as he waited for the inevitable crash to come.

There are sometimes moments in a man's life which seem about to be his last, and there is often some quick thinking done in these moments. Haskell realized full well the seriousness of the situation, and could see no possible escape from it, unless the operator back at Glenfells had not only understood, but had had presence of mind enough to wire ahead and clear the track. Then he suddenly recollected that at that hour the telegraph office at Glenfells was usually closed and deserted, and all hope from that quarter vanished suddenly.

He knew that the through freight must be somewhere just ahead and coming on, unconscious of their mutual danger. He also knew that Burrell was resourceless in his collapse, and that if anything was to be done it must be accomplished by his own efforts, and

that immediately.

He thought of the crowded coaches in the rear, and vaguely wondered if he could in any way uncouple the connection and leave them safely behind; but a second reflection showed him how useless such an attempt must be—a mere waste of precious time—for it would be impossible for him to draw the coupling-pin with the drag of the train upon it, and he was forced reluctantly to abandon the idea.

Somehow, his brain seemed unusually clear, and he tried to reason things out

in a logical manner.

He was familiar with the road through constant service, and from the glimpse of flying landscape he knew that they must be within a mile or so of Philbrook, a small tank station, and, according to the time, the freight must be either at or just beyond the tank. Number Forty-Seven was at least five miles and ten minutes ahead of its own running schedule, and unless by some miraculous intervention the freight was side-tracked, there must be a head-on collision somewhere between the tank station and Galesburg, the next station, three miles beyond.

With little or no hope of success, but forced to realize the need of immediate action of some kind if anything was to be done to avert the impending disaster, Haskell snatched a blank page from his route-book and scribbled hastily:

Clear track. No. 47 running wild.

Catching up Burrell's discarded revolver from the floor, he folded the paper and thrust it into the muzzle of the weapon. Wrapping and tying it securely in his handkerchief, he stepped to the side door, slid it quickly back, and glanced out.

He was just in time, for he caught the quick rush of the plank walk beside the track leading to the little telegraph station beside the tank. Raising his arm suddenly, he hurled the weapon-weighted handkerchief with all his strength straight at the little shanty as they tore

past it.

A loud crash of splintering glass gave him the small satisfaction of knowing that his message had at least been delivered, and fully expecting each moment to hear the whistle of the approaching freight or feel its impending concussion, he grasped the side of the door and stood ready to jump at the first warning.

Suddenly he heard it above the clatter of the train—the whistle of the oncoming freight-then with a deafening roar the express approached and thundered over a trestle a hundred feet in mid With a shudder, Haskell glanced giddily down into the rock-ribbed depths of the ravine, and as he did so he heard the voice of Kelly raised in loud maudlin cries and curses.

These ended suddenly in one wild demoniacal yell, and Haskell caught the glimpse of a dark plunging shape as it shot headlong from the swaying engine over the side straight down into the vawning chasm. Then, as he stood for a moment too horrified to move, he suddenly realized that they had left the trestle far behind and were rapidly approaching Galesburg, and consequently must be close upon the freight.

Another whistle, still nearer, loud and prolonged, came from somewhere just ahead, and Haskell glanced back into the car at the terrified conductor.

"For God's sake, save yourself. Jump quick!" he called desperately.

He gathered himself for a flying leap through the open door, but there was a sudden increasing roar and a thundering rush followed by a hot, hissing blast and a quick kaleidoscopic flash of colors mingled in one composite streak. Then a sudden, shockless sound of broken and splintering wood, and the string of freight-cars crawled over on to the siding, minus the last left-hand step of the caboose, as the express swept past.

With the cold sweat gathering in great beads upon his forehead, Haskell drew a deep breath of relief and staggered back from the door. He then realized that there was a sudden decrease in their speed, and that the car no longer lurched and swayed so dangerously from side to side. The train was steadily beginning to slacken its speed, and he reeled to the end of the car to look again into the cab. He saw that Danny, still pale, and with the blood streaming down his face, was at the throttle and had the engine well under control.

A little later, with a long shriek of the whistle, Number Forty-Seven rolled past Galesburg and into Davis Junction fully fifteen minutes ahead of its own time.

### THE BUTTERFLY.

THE butterfly from flower to flower The urchin chased; and, when at last He caught it in my lady's bower, He cried, "Ha, ha!" and held it fast.

Awhile he laugh'd, but soon he wept, When looking at the prize he'd caught He found he had to ruin swept The very glory he had sought.

# THE SCARLET SCARAB.\*

BY ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "In the Lion's Mouth," "The Fugitive," and "Blundell's Last Guest."

A story of Naples up to date in which an American gets on the track of romance by accident and is thereafter made to dance to a dangerous tune.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

BILLY GREGG'S GLORIOUS DISBELIEF.

A BOVE me, seemingly a bare hundred yards away in that concussion-cleared air, loomed the summit of Vesuvius. Yet not the summit I had been accustomed to see.

The great jagged cone that had stuck so awkwardly heavenward had vanished. In its place was a low-capped summit, rounded and unbroken, like a mighty ash-heap, from whose center rolled up black masses of fire-shot vapor.

Something struck the ground within three feet of me, raising a cloud of ashes. Ten feet away a second, and then a third, object fell.

They were stones from the shattered cone. And now, thick and fast, the red-hot projectiles rained about me.

But I had no time or thought for them. For, reeling forward, I stumbled feebly to the giant fissure that yawned athwart the spot where the hovel had stood.

Down its gaping maw had vanished the rear half of the cabin and its three occupants—the peasant, my friend, and the woman I would have died to save.

The fissure was not caused by a lavaburst, nor was the smoke thick that oozed from it. It was simply one of innumerable huge cracks in the mountainside, caused by the convulsion of the subterranean eruption.

I flung myself on my face beside it, and leaning far over the crumbling edge, peered downward.

The fissure was perhaps ten yards across. About it swirled little eddies of suddenly disturbed ashes, rendering the dark, gaping interior vague and indistinct, even in that lurid glare.

About me whizzed and crashed the falling stones from the crater. One of them grazed my head, but I did not feel any pain. All the sensation whereof I was capable was centered in my bleared, smarting eyes that peered so helplessly down that dusty cavern wherein was entombed the woman of my heart.

And little by little, as I gazed, the ash-swirls settled, and I could see farther and farther down into the vast earth-gash.

And all at once I heard a strangled voice that I dimly recognized as my own crying out despairingly a woman's name.

For I had seen her.

There, on a little ledge, formed by a stratum of trembling tufa rock, twenty feet below me, she lay, silent, inert, hanging on the very verge of the deeper chasm that stretched far beneath her into the very bowels of the earth.

So she had fallen, and so she lay, a bare score of feet distant from the man who would have risked a thousand lives to save her, but who was powerless to do aught except to lie there impotent and groaning, awaiting the moment when the swaying shelf of rock should collapse beneath her weight.

There was but one thing left to do; there was but one step more in life for me. I gathered myself together to swing over the steep earthen precipice that separated us. Then I started back with a cry, unnerved, trembling.

For, up toward her, out of that black abyss below, was creeping a weird, gruesome Thing!

On all-fours It crept, indistinct, shapeless, in the gloom of the fissure. It seemed to have no head, no known form, but to glide upward through the drifting smoke on the wings of darkness.

<sup>\*</sup> This story began in the September issue of The Argory. The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.

Then, as It drew nearer, I could see that It was moving along a narrow earth-crease left in the side of the fissure by the downward rush of some great boulder. Up the steep crease It crawled, catlike, writhingly, on a pathway that looked far too narrow and too uncertain to support a Being of half Its uncouth size.

At length It reached the rock-ledge where lay Doris Todd. It paused in Its wormlike upward maneuvers and gazed at her. To my overwrought

in it was something unbearably horrible that this Creature of Earth and Darkness should profane my dead love with Its presence.

With a crablike gesture It reached out an arm and touched her. Then my self-control fled.

With a scream I snatched up a stone as large as a cannon-ball that had, a moment earlier, struck the ash-piled ground at my side. It was red-hot, and burned me to the bone; but I whirled it aloft and dashed it downward at the subterranean Creature that had dared molest her.

My nervous, excited aim was false. The stone narrowly missed the Creature and bounded down the measureless depths of the fissure. There was no thud to indicate that it ever found a resting-place.

But at sound of my cry the Creature paused and looked upward. The light from above flickered athwart Its face—and it was Billy Gregg!

Billy Gregg, coated with ashes, dirt, and slime, almost past recognition, yet wearing on his pallid, dirt-grimed face that old perennial grin.

"Pete," he observed, his voice caroming in hollow echoes from side to side of the cavern—"Pete, you're a cheesy stone-thrower. You couldn't hit the side of a house. But what's your idee in makin' me your target?"

The revulsion had turned me dizzy; but in an instant I was myself again.

"Is she dead?" I gasped.

"Dead? Why should she be? Sure she ain't! Not even hurt, so far's I can see. But she's fainted. These Matteucci diversions are kind o' strenuous for women. He's liable to have an accident on his hands one of these days. Hold on a second and I'll bring her up to you."

While I crouched, breathless and horror-wrung, Gregg lifted her gently, laid her across his lumpy, muscular shoulders, and slowly began again his ascent along the narrow groove. Had the cavern's sides been of mere earth they must have crumbled at once under the double weight. But they were of tufa and clay, solid and compact.

It must have been a boulder of incalculable size and heaviness that had plowed so sharp a furrow in that tough wall. Yet, as it was, the sides of the groove crumbled at Billy's every step, and great bits of the edge broke loose and crashed downward into the gulf below.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, Gregg wriggled his upward way, puffing and grunting under the strain that called on the last reserves of even his hickoryhard muscles.

Above I waited dumb and breathless. It seemed incredible that any human being could keep footing and balance on that narrow and ever-narrowing groove.

He swung out perilously far over the side. More than once he almost lost his balance—wavered over the brink, and then, scratching and clawing like a cat on a wall, recovered himself.

One lapse of nerve, one instant of terror, and he must have been lost. But in intervals of panting he snickered wheezily, and muttered:

"Say! That Matteucci chap's a wonder! He's got Coney beat a mile! There ain't a thing at Luna Park or Dreamland or Steeplechase that's a patch on that slide I took, Pete! Ground just opened up and down went Willie. Bang! I fetched up against a rock as big as the Statoo of Liberty. I felt my way along up, follerin' the scratch in the dirt that the rock made, an' pretty soon what do I run across but Miss Todd, all neatly disposed on another rock? An' then this path all fixed for a climb. It beats me how Matteucci could 'a' framed it all up like this. I-now what are we up against?" he broke off abruptly. "This groove don't go no farther!"

And, indeed, the crease of clay had terminated, six feet below the surface,

in sheer wall. Stamping for precarious foothold, Billy Gregg swore softly.
"I wish I could figger out what's

"I wish I could figger out what's the next move Mr. Matteucci's fixed up in this subway scenic railroad of his!" he mused aloud. "It's kind o' slippery here; an' we're liable to do a tumble an' have the whole climb to begin over again. If we do, I hope next time I'll fall on something softer'n that measly rock!"

He had no sense of danger; only one of vague annoyance, as at a joke that had been carried almost too far. He was shaking with fatigue from his terrible climb. At any moment he might lose his footing. And then——

I shut my eyes in a spasm of uncontrollable fear. But with the terror came

strength and sanity.

I tore off my coat, and with one tug ripped it in two pieces. Knotting the sleeves firmly together and tying my waistcoat to one of the ends, I leaned down the crevice and dangled the bulky, improvised rope in front of the exhausted Billy.

He saw my idea even before I spoke. Gently shifting Doris's body from his shoulder, he passed the rope of clothes about her waist, supporting her in his arms as he did so, the toes of his boots slipping and shuffling over the verge.

At last the knot was fast. Gathering all my strength, and bracing myself against the ash-covered ground, I drew her up. She was light, or I could not, in my trembling condition, have accom-

plished the feat.

Lifting her to the ground beside me, I pulled loose the knot and again lowered the rope. Billy, meanwhile, relieved of his burden and no longer forced to move, had regained some of his strength.

"Hold hard!" he called, "an' I'll show you the hand-over-hand stunt they used to teach on the schoolship before I

got fired."

Up he came, his every tug at the rope threatening to drag me into the hole after him. As he crawled over the ledge and rolled safe in the ashes he looked about him in delighted wonder.

"What in Sam Hill's happened to

old V'soovius?" he panted.

He pointed a bleeding finger at the

weird gray summit down whose rounded, ash-clad sides smoking rivulets of molten lava were pouring, and whose crater still belched masses of fiery rock.

A roar of thunder answered him, and the lurid sky blazed from horizon to horizon with a blinding glare of lightning. Crash followed crash as the electric storm burst in its mad fury, the incessant play of lightning searing our eyeballs and adding new terror to the stone-strewn sky.

About us whizzed and fell the great red-hot rocks. Above flashed the terrible lightning, while earth and sky roared and reverberated with earthquake

and thunderclap.

And in the midst of it we three human atoms lay helpless, at the fissure's edge.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

### LOVE AND A KING.

A VOLCANIC stone hurtling past my head roused me from the momentary apathy of relief into which I had fallen.

I bent over Doris Todd, raising her head in my arms. Her eyelids flickered.

I turned to Billy.

"Have you still got that flask?" I asked. "The one you used on me the other day? That's good!" as he fished the battered metal vial from his pocket. "Hand it over."

I forced a little of the raw spirits between Doris's lips. She shuddered, and

opened her eyes.

In an agony of apprehension I watched for a look of pain to come into her face as, after another sip from the flask, she tried to rise. I feared the fall might have injured her. But, with Billy's help (ignoring my proffered aid), she managed to stand.

She evidently had not fallen, direct, to that rock in the fissure, but when the earth opened had merely slid (like Billy and the remnants of the cottage itself) down the steep incline until contact with the shelf of rock had checked her fall and knocked her senseless.

Within half an hour she was able to walk, totteringly, unevenly, between us, supported on either side by our arms.

Part way down the slope, a few hundred yards distant, was a cluster of

houses, with a lane beyond that apparently led to the road which skirts the base of Vesuvius.

Toward this hamlet we started. Not only would the increased distance between ourselves and the crater render us far less liable to destruction from the stones which still flew thick about us, but the houses themselves might afford us temporary shelter until the rock-storm should abate.

And so (our way illumined amid that ghastly gray ghostland by the neverending play of lightning; the ground under our feet swaying and groaning; the air about us vibrating with the shock of volleyed thunder-peals) we floundered through the ash-drifts and over black lava-crusts that blistered our soles until we neared the settlement.

The place seemed deserted. The lava-flow had spared it, but several of the houses lay in ruins, shaken down by the earthquake. Over all spread that ever-present coating of gritty, graywhite dust, blanching walls, ground, grass, and even the leaves of the cypress and olive-trees, into a uniform drab hue.

I shouted, but no reply came. Evidently, the inhabitants had long since joined the human river that had for days been flowing toward Naples for safety.

The houses were of far better sort than those which strewed the higher slopes. Evidently, persons of some consequence had lived here.

We turned into the lane at the head of the little settlement, and rounding the corner of a ruined chapel, almost collided with a man who was lifting a heavy sack into a cart. Just ahead stood two other carts, with one or two men near them.

The man we had almost run against dropped his sack. Shouting to his companions, he snatched a musket from the cart and whirled about on us. His companions, in a flash, had followed his example.

We stood unarmed, helpless, confronted by four disreputable, villainous-looking Neapolitans, who covered us with their guns.

Billy started back with an oath, then flung himself between Doris and the threatening weapons. For myself, I stood still. One of the rare ideas that have interspersed my career now came to me.

Tossing aside the torn fragments of the coat that I had wrapped about my shoulders as protection against the ashes, I touched with one hand the scarlet scarab, which still adorned my tie.

"Murena," I said, "your memory is short"

The foremost man, at sight of the scarab, let his musket fall unheeded to the ground, while he sought to peer through the mask of blood and dirt and ashes that smeared my face.

"Eccelenza!" he gasped, "You?"

His comrades, on seeing the scarab, had lowered their weapons, and now crowded forward in respectful eagerness.

"You were about to assassinate us?" I asked, while Doris and Billy looked on in amazement at the sudden turn affairs had taken.

"Can eccelenza forgive our stupidity?" stammered Murena. "You see, I and a few of my men have taken advantage of the panic to save a few trifles from the earthquake—in other words, to search deserted houses for such valuables as their scared owners may have overlooked in their flight. Naturally, the task was of a sort that could not brook intrusion. Possible tale-bearers are out of place at such a time.

"Believe me, in shooting such intruders we should have acted only in self-protection, lest they might carry word to the soldiery, down below there, and cause us misfortune. But eccelenza and his friends are in distress! We are your excellency's servants. Command

"This lady," said I, "is weak and unnerved. I wish her transported to the nearest point where we can get train or boat back to Naples."

"Our carts, eccelenza—they are poor, rough affairs, but two of them have springs. If eccelenza and his friends would deign—"

"Eccelenza" and his friends did deign. Five minutes later, two carts were winding down the ash-choked lane toward the main road. In the foremost sat Murena, and beside him, Billy Gregg. In the rear cart, driven by a.

black-jowled fellow who knew no English, were Doris Todd and myself.

To her surprise, and possibly displeasure, I had quietly swung myself into the vehicle beside her and had sat down with her on a heap of sacks behind the driver.

For a space, as we jolted along, neither of us spoke. She was very pale, and rested her head wearily on her hands. She was worn out, unstrung. This was surely no time to say what I had resolved to say.

So I said it.

"May I speak to you?" I began,

lamely enough.

"Is it necessary?" she queried wearily, a faint suggestion of scorn in her sweet, tired voice. "Remember, 'We can have nothing in common,' you and I. You said so yourself."

"And I lied when I said it!" I broke forth. "For we have so much in common that for me there is no one in this whole wretched world but you.' Whoever and whatever you are-whatever you have done or may yet do-I love you! I love you! Doris, can't you see what it means to me?

"I know your secret, and its knowledge was the deadliest blow fate ever dealt a luckless man. I tried to put you out of my heart, out of my life. But always you crept back. When I saw you lying there, so still, so silent, on that ledge, I believed you dead. And then I knew that there could be no more fighting against this love of mine. I saw that, living or dead, I was all yours. Your past, your chosen goal in life, matter nothing. If you will not re-nounce them, then I will accept them along with you. I---"

The look on her white face arrested

At my first words she had started, and a momentary wave of color had rushed into her cheeks. But as I went on, in this the first and last confession of love I was ever to make, a look of wonder and bewilderment filled her

"I-I don't understand," she murmured. "You speak of my 'past,' my 'goal in life,' of 'whoever and what-ever' I may be! You talk as though I had done something unworthy-were following some doubtful course. Will you please explain?"

Her words, delivered in such seeming innocence, sent a shock through me. But what I had said I meant.

Whoever and whatever she was-no matter if she should refuse to renounce lier membership in that vile Brotherhood-I was hers for all time and eternity. I had struggled, but it was use-

"Please tell me what you mean?" she said, as I hesitated.

"I am speaking of the Brotherhood of Vienna, as you know. Why evade the point, dear? Can't you be honest even with me?"

She was gazing at me now in a blank amaze whose sincerity there was no doubting. It was my turn to wax

"The Brotherhood of Vienna?" she echoed, with the same uncomprehending look. "What is that?"

"If you don't know," I asked bluntly, "how do you happen to be wearing its scarlet scarab over your heart?"

"But I don't!"

Again that thrill of bitter disappointment and shame filled my whole being. For she had spoken with the same open innocence as when denying knowledge of the Brotherhood.

"Doris," I said, "that night on the balcony of the Masaniello—the night I left Naples-I saw the scarab on your breast. How came it there?"

Again she flushed to the roots of her

"I can't tell you," she replied in a low, indistinct voice.

"You admit, then, that you wore it?" She bent her averted head.

"And yet you don't know what the Brotherhood of Vienna is?"

"I have told you I do not."

I was weary of catechizing her, and I shrank before the pain and embarrassment the ordeal evidently caused her.

"It doesn't matter," I cried. "I love you! Tell me the truth, or lie to me, as you choose. I love you!"

"And you show that love by insulting me?"

The weary droop of her head had given way to a bearing that an empress might have envied.

"There is no love without trust," she went on. "And when you tell me in one breath that you love me, and in the next accuse me of untruthfulness-

The disdainful voice trembled. The dainty little head lost some of its haughty pose as she turned from me.

"I do believe you! I do trust you!" I exclaimed. "Facts can be as strong as they please. I'll forget them all, and only remember that you're dearer than all else to me. I love you, Doris. Can't

you care at all for me? "

"' Care for you?'" she replied softly, her head still averted. "Care for you '? Oh, Pierre, you know I do! You knew it all the time! Up there on the hill, that night, you told me you had seen me wearing the scarab, and that you knew my secret, and that that was why you avoided me. Because we had nothing in com-"

My arms were about her, and she was sobbing on my breast. The drivernoblest and most blessed of cutthroatshad the heroism not to turn around.

"The scarab," she sobbed, when her lips (which for the best of reasons were for a moment or two out of commission) were again at her disposal-"the scarab must have fallen from your coat that afternoon when you all took five-o'clock tea in our rooms at the Masaniello. found it on the floor after you had gone to dress for dinner. And-because it was yours, and because you seemed fond of it-I wore it that evening; hidden, where no one could see it. I meant to give it back to you later, when we should be alone together on the balcony. That's why I followed you out there. Then—after—after what happened there, I sent the chambermaid with it to your rooms and told her to leave it on your dressing-table and---"

The cart halted. The long-suffering driver, without turning in his seat, addressed me loudly in Italian, bringing Doris and myself back to earth again.

Above us had flashed and roared the storm; about us the hail of fire-stones had rattled; beneath us the ground had trembled; behind us the volcano had belched forth death. And we had forgotten it all! We had even forgotten to note whither we were traveling.

As the driver's voice brought us to

the realities of life again. I looked around me in surprise. We had long since left the lane, and were now part of the endless procession thronging the highroad.

Carts and wagons, heaped with household goods, amid which sat wailing children and praying women; hundreds of plodding villagers hurrying along the wayside; sick folk carried tenderly on litters—these were everywhere. where that mad flight from the unchained Demon of the Mountain.

But an obstruction of some sort now blocked our way.

"The hospital corps, eccelenza," explained the driver in his slurring Sicilian patois. "They are removing the slain from the temporary hospital, at the turn of the road, into the wagons and ambulances. We must wait

Billy, who, with Murena, had been somewhat in advance of us, and had jumped from his cart to investigate, now hurried back to where we waited. His merry, ugly little face was distorted by a look of dumfounded horror.

"Miss Todd," he cried, "when we move on keep your eyes to the left till after we've got past that turn ahead, there. An', Pete," he added, in an awed whisper, "it—it ain't a fake! straight! All of it. I saw-I saw them lyin' there. An'-an' Sebaste was one of 'em! I-

A ragged shout, running along the line of vehicles, interrupted him. A cloud of dust, down the road, resolved itself into a great touring-car that whizzed toward us as rapidly as the crowded condition of the road would permit.

As it neared the blockade the machine came to a halt. Among its several occupants I noted a sweet-faced woman, beside whom was seated a man with uncovered head.

The man was short, slender, and sallow. His close-cropped yellow hair was brushed straight back from his forehead, while his bristling little mustache twisted aspiringly upward toward his kindly light eyes. He wore a gray traveling-suit, and there was nothing ostentatious about his costume or bearing.

Yet, from innumerable photographs I recognized him at a glance, as did Doris, and even Billy Gregg.

The little man was Victor Emmanuel.

King of Italy.

Even in their panic, the people stopped to cheer the young monarch they loved so well and whose former title, "Prince of Naples," has further endeared him to hearts in Southern Italy.

The royal car had halted within a vard of us. A woman, from among the wayside pedestrians, carrying a sick child in her arms, pushed recklessly through the press and gained the side of the automobile.

"Your majesty!" she screamed, disregarding the driver's attempts to stop her. "Your majesty! The mountain is hurling death over our lands! If you indeed are a king, bid the destruction cease!"

How shall I, with any hope of being believed, describe what followed? every newspaper of the time chronicled the incredible story.

His majesty, his eyes alight with pity. looked from the horror-stricken face of his suppliant to that of her child; then on to the huddled crowd of refugees. Last of all his gaze rested on the mountain, from whose vomiting crater the high wind was swirling a black mass of vapor and ashes across the once fertile country below.

Then the king raised his arm—in a gesture of infinite dignity and appealand stretched it out toward the volcano.

On the instant, as though in actual obedience to his unspoken command, the gale whipped about, hurling the whole mighty black cloud backward before it. The rain of ashes ceased, and the thunder was, for the first time, silent.

A gasp went up from the multitude. The ensuing awestruck stillness was broken by a nasal East-Side voice.

"Mr. King," exclaimed Billy Gregg, with solemn approbation, "b' gee, you're all to the good! An' if you ever come to Noo York I want you to look me up. You can bet a week's pay I'll see you're treated right!"

THE END.

# A DOUBLE DECEPTION.

BY JOHN QUINCY MAWHINNEY.

A theater-party that went wrong to the entire satisfaction of the two people most closely concerned therein.

"TELEGRAM, sir!"

Frank Crawford paused in the act of closing his roll-top desk as the officeboy handed him the despatch. Tearing it open, his face assumed an expression of annoyance, and with an "Oh, pshaw!" he yanked the telephone-receiver from its hook and mumbled a number into the transmitter.

After a short pause, Central succeeded

in making the connection.

"Hello! Is that you, Smith? Well, this is Crawford. Now, don't try to interrupt me. Listen to what I have to say. I'm sore from the skin in and the scalp down. I can't be with you tonight at the Forrest Theater. Just received a wire. Regarding that corporation deal, you know. Two of the members are to be in New York to-night and I'll have to meet them. It's a beastly shame.

"Now, don't butt in. I want you to save the day for me. The tickets are at the theater box-office, in my name. Go early, old man, for I promised my wife we would be there to meet her. She don't know you, but just be on the job a little before time and get the seats. Wait near the box-office until you hear somebody ask for Crawford's box. Then step in and make yourself known. It will be my wife.

"I can't get word to her, in any way, just now. She's dining out some place-I've forgotten the number and they have no telephone. I told her if you and I got there first we would wait for her, but if she arrived before us to ask for one of the tickets and go in and take her seat-see? Now you understand Forrest Theater, eight everything. o'clock. Mrs. Crawford. What? You have a cold, haven't you? That's too bad. Explain to her, old man, and I'll probably be at home when you arrive. So long."

Crawford heaved a sigh of relief as he hung the receiver back on its hook and turned to get out the papers to be gone over by the members of the new corporation. He felt confident that his friend Smith would fix things all right. Then he suddenly sat back in his chair and slapped the papers on his desk with his open palm.

"By Jove! I forgot to tell him about Sister Betty coming with my wife. Hang it! I'm a pumpkin, I am. But then, come to think of it, it doesn't matter. Alice will fix it up all right."

And he again picked up his papers and dismissed the matter from his mind. But he would have been considerably concerned had he foreseen the outcome of "the present arrangements.

At that very moment his wife, Alice, was swallowing a large and spicy dose

of Jamaica ginger.

At dinner she had partaken of too many sliced cucumbers. The masticated vegetable proved an uncongenial neighbor to sundry delicacies which had been served as dessert, with the result that Mrs. Crawford was-well, suffering. The ginger failed to be entirely successful, and Mrs. Crawford decided that the best thing to do would be to take a cab home. Betty accompanied her.

"Oh, why did you eat those cucumbers, Alice? You know they don't agree

with vou."

"Yes, dear, but I am so passionately fond of them I couldn't resist.

they were served so tastily, too."

"They have not served you equally so," returned Betty, a trifle annoyed at her sister-in-law's folly. "What shall we do about the theater? It is now almost eight o'clock, and Frank and his friend will be waiting for us."

"Betty," replied Mrs. Crawford, "I can see but one way out of it. You will have to meet Mr. Crawford and his friend Mr. Smith at the theater by yourself. They will be waiting for you in the lobby, and they must not be disappointed. Frank told me he would buy a box and leave it there, so in case they have not arrived by the time you do, just ask for one of the seats and go inside. It is out of the question for me to attend. Tell Frank not to worry, for I shall be all right in an hour or so."

After a few more pros and cons had been discussed and Betty had readjusted her dinner toilet with a tuck here and a pat there, she was ready to proceed to the theater and to a mix-up she little contemplated. A hansom was called, and she was soon whirling down-town to meet her brother Frank and his unknown friend Smith.

Arriving at the theater, she tripped lightly into the lobby. It was about eight-twenty-five, and the curtain had been up some ten minutes.

An anxious glance sufficed to show her that Brother Frank was not on the scene, but near the box-office window stood a tall, handsome fellow who seemed to be eving her with considerable interest. She did not meet his gaze, but hastened to the window and inquired for her brother's box.

Before the ticket-seller could reply, the stranger doffed his hat and with a bow becoming a Chesterfield explained that he was Mr. Smith.

Betty was all smiles in an instant.

"I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Smith, but where is Frank?"

Smith elucidated, but in his explanation Betty was surprised to find that he mistook her for her brother's wife, Mrs. Crawford. On the spur of the moment she decided to leave matters as they stood and not to inform him of his error. If it came to a show-down she could wriggle out of it by pleading innocence, saying she had misunderstood him, inasmuch as "Miss" sounds very much like "Mrs."

She told him that "Alice" was unable to come on account of a slight indisposition, but as Smith had not heard of any "Alice" before, he did not comment on the fact further than to express his sympathy.

The play proved so interesting that any conversation during its progress was out of the question and, during the cntr'acts the time was taken up with a discussion of the play's and the players' merits. Thus, the evening passed very pleasantly, and at the end of the performance Smith was still of the impression that he was talking with Mrs. and not Miss Crawford.

When they left the theater it was Betty's turn to be surprised. Smith handed his check to the carriage man, and upon its number being flashed from the signal-board a large automobile puffed up to the curb, into which Smith helped her and saw that she was comfortably seated. Then he took his seat beside her.

Her brother had never mentioned the fact that Smith had a car, but Betty was the last person on earth to show any surprise in a case like this, so she calmly assumed that it was all expected and

laughed and chatted gaily.

They started up Broadway, and as they passed Fiftieth Street Smith suddenly remarked that although he had known her brother some time, he did not recollect that Frank had ever mentioned the street and number of his resi-Betty quickly furnished the dence. necessary information, and as One Hundred and Tenth Street was a considerable distance up, it was decided they would go through Central Park. cordingly, a word to the chauffeur sufficed to whirl them into the Fifty-Ninth Street entrance, and they were soon speeding along the Park's smooth avenues at a fast clip.

### H.

MEANWHILE, Crawford finished his transactions with the corporation members and took the Subway home. What was his surprise, then, upon entering his flat, to discover that his wife had not gone to the theater.

His amazement was equaled only by her own, and for a minute or two they stood looking at each other as though some great catastrophe had taken place.

Alice spoke first.

"Why, where is Betty?"

"How do I know?" returned her husband. "I supposed she was with you. Didn't you attend the theater?"

"No, but she did. Didn't you?"

"I did not. I was detained at the

office. But I relied on you to be with her. What happened?"

His wife explained. In his turn, her husband explained, and then they began to conjecture on what took place at the theater.

"She doesn't know Smith," began

Alice.

"And Smith doesn't know her," replied Crawford.

"You say you told him to meet me, but you did not mention Betty?"

"Exactly."

"Well, they must have met, or Betty

would have been home again."

"I suppose so," mused Crawford; but then, again, maybe they did not meet. Probably Betty entered the theater and is there yet, waiting for us to show up."

"Oh, that would be dreadful, Frank! The poor girl! You must go right down

to the theater and meet her."

Crawford glanced at his watch.

"I'll barely have time," he replied, seizing his hat. "If the show lets out promptly at eleven I may miss her."

"Oh, hurry, hurry!" exclaimed his wife, pushing him out of the door and then running to the front window to watch him as he dashed off down the

street to the Subway station.

But the Subway, even with its expresses, is sometimes as unreliable as any other means of travel, and of course it proved so in this case. Something went wrong at Ninety-Sixth Street, and the train was stalled for about ten minutes. Crawford was sitting on pins and needles, and when the train finally reached Times Square he rushed from the building at race-horse speed.

Alas! his efforts were futile. The theater was dark when he arrived on the

scene

What could be done? Nothing. He pushed his hands into his pockets and walked slowly toward Broadway. Then an idea came to him.

Of course! Why didn't he think of it before? He would call up his wife and find out whether Betty had arrived at home, which, undoubtedly, she had.

He dropped into the nearest pay-station and called for his flat. He succeeded in raising the private Central in the apartment-house, but she was unable, in turn, to get Crawford's apartment. Would he wait a moment and she would send a boy up to tell Mrs. Crawford?

He would. He waited. He waited some time, and then the answer he received nearly caused him to throw a fit.

The boy came down and told the telephone Central that he had knocked several times at the Crawford door, but had received no response. He then knocked at the door of the flat across the hall, and the woman there, a Mrs. Wilkins, informed him that Mrs. Crawford had hurried out about fifteen or twenty minutes before, although Mrs. Wilkins did not know where she had gone.

This information was transmitted to Crawford. He was surprised; he was mystified; he was considerably perturbed. He hurriedly paid for the call

and dashed outside.

Afraid to trust to the Subway after his recent experience, he hired an electric hansom and was soon speeding toward One Hundred and Tenth Street. It was a long ride, and in the course of it Crawford's mind was busy with a thousand theories. He could not imagine why his wife should have gone out at that time of night.

By the time he reached his flat he was considerably agitated. Telling the cabman to wait, he rushed up the stairs three steps at a time, not waiting for the elevator. He rushed to his apartment and unlocked the door.

The lamp on the center-table was lighted, and directly under its rays he saw a note addressed to him. He picked it up and opened it with trembling fingers.

It was a hasty scrawl, and there was no salutation, but he recognized his

wife's handwriting.

Just ree'd word Betty has met with an accident. She is now at the office of Dr. Westfield, Central Pk. West and 82nd St. I have hastened to her. Follow me.

One mystery was cleared, but another had developed. An accident to Betty? What could have happened? A wreck on the Subway immediately flashed into Crawford's mind.

He hurried out of the room and down-

stairs. He was glad he had told the cabman to wait. Jumping in, he was soon on his way to the doctor's office.

But here he was baffled again, so far as catching his wife and Betty was concerned. They had left, about five minutes before, in a large automobile.

In fact, as the doctor explained, it was in an automobile that Betty had received her injury. A strained ankle, painful, though not serious.

"An automobile!" interrupted Crawford, in amazement. "What was she

doing in an automobile?"

"Taking a ride, I suppose," answered the physician, but his raillery was lost on Crawford.

"An automobile?" he pondered, and then, suddenly, to the doctor: "Who was with her?"

"A man by the name of Smith. They ran into something or other—I don't know exactly what. They weren't very profuse with explanations. He came out of it with a turned wrist."

"Humph!" muttered Crawford, still very much puzzled. "Where did they get the other machine to take the women home in?"

"This Smith called up some garage near-by and they rushed one over in about ten minutes," replied the physician.

Crawford did not pause to learn more, but hastened out and reentered the hansom. It looked as if he was going to use the vehicle all night.

"Back to One Hundred and Tenth Street," he instructed the driver.

Glancing up, as they approached his residence, he saw there were lights in the windows, and concluded that he had found the women at last. Therefore, he dismissed the cab, after paying a pretty large fee, and ascended the stairs to his apartment. The elevator had stopped running at twelve.

Upon entering his rooms he found Betty propped up in bed and his wife sitting by her side, awaiting his return.

"What in the name of all that's remarkable has happened?" he blurted out, as he strode quickly to the bedside of his sister.

She smiled faintly and turned to Crawford's wife.

"Now, don't excite yourself, Frank. It is nothing serious."

"Don't excite myself?" he exclaimed. "My! but you say that easily. Why, for the last hour and a half I have been in a regular pot-stew. What does all this mix-up mean? The physician said there had been an automobile accident."

"So there was," replied Betty, brushing back some of the tendrils of loose hair which persisted in wreathing her beautiful face. "I was just telling Alice how it happened; that is, as much

as I can remember.

"We had entered the Park, and were going at a pretty speedy rate. But it was late, and we wished to get home as quickly as possible, so Mr. Smith allowed the chauffeur to go as fast as he liked. But as we mounted a slight elevation and started down-grade Mr. Smith touched the driver on the shoulder and told him to slow down a little at the curve. The chauffeur nodded his head. We were going at a terrible pace, and I was pretty much frightened, but I didn't say anything, because he might have thought I had never been out in a machine before."

"Have you ever?" asked her brother.

"No, but I didn't need to let him know, did I? Well, as we approached the curve the man at the wheel grabbed one of those brakes on the side, you know, and pushed it forward with all his might. As he did so, something snapped, but the machine did not slow down. We hit the curve, and then a tree, and then the ground, and the next thing I knew I was in the doctor's office having my ankle bound in bandages. It hurt awfully. Mr. Smith's wrist was injured. He said the clutch—wasn't it, Alice?—had broken."

"But that wasn't the funniest part of it," continued Alice, turning to her husband. "This little goose had been masquerading all the time as 'Mrs.' Crawford instead of 'Miss,' and that poor Mr. Smith hasn't found out the difference"

"Poor Mr. Smith?" snorted her husband. "He doesn't seem to be very poor, owning an automobile. He never told me that he had a machine. Had I known he was able to keep one of the things, I'd been after him long ago to settle a little sum of something like two thousand dollars he owes me. It is too

late now, or I would call him up. Why didn't he wait until I came home?"

"His wrist hurt him so, he decided to go to his own physician and have it at-

tended to," replied Betty.

"His own physician, indeed! He seems to have been playing the high and mighty this evening. I suppose, come to think of it, he hired the machine, but I never thought he would blow himself to that extent. Now he will have to pay a pretty penny to have it repaired, and I never will see the color of that two thousand."

#### HI.

WITH that the piqued Mr. Crawford retired.

The next morning, before going to the office, he called up his friend Smith. The following conversation took place:

" Is that you, Smith?"

"Yes. Who is this?"

"Crawford. Say, how about that automobile accident, last night?"

"What automobile accident, last

night?" asked Smith.

"Why, the smash-up in Central Park."

"Don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, stop kidding, Smith. How is your wrist?"

"Which one?"

"The one you broke?"

"Did I break a wrist?"

"So the women said."

"What women?"

"Oh, get off the shafts. Talk sense."

"I wish you would practise what you preach. I don't know what you are talking about, Crawford. I was never in an automobile in my life,"

" What!"

"Honest. And my wrists are still solid. By the way, I thought you were going to call for me at the hotel last night to take me to some theater. I rigged up in my best and sat around here for an hour and a half, and then I gave it up as a fiasco. Did you call it off?"

Something was beginning to work its way into Crawford's confused thinking compartment. But he decided to try an-

other tack.

"Why, I talked to you over the 'phone about it, old man."

"You must be dreaming," retorted Smith. "I never received any word

from you."

"Do you mean to tell me that I didn't talk to you on the telephone about six o'clock?"

"Emphatically, yes."

"And that you did not go to the Forrest Theater and meet my sister?"

"I did not."

"And that you didn't take her out in

an auto after the show?"

"How could I if I wasn't there. Besides, I haven't ever had the pleasure of meeting your sister. You know that. But what in the world are you driving at?"

"I haven't time to explain now. I'll call you up again," and with these words Crawford hung up the receiver and turned to face two startled women.

Picture three people in a room after some one has shouted fire and there is no way of escape. This is about how Crawford, his wife, and his sister looked as he turned from the telephone.

They had heard enough of his conversation to understand that something was radically wrong, and they waited in open-mouthed astonishment for him to speak.

"Well, if that doesn't take the cake

I'll jump in the river."

"What does it mean, Frank?" asked

"Mean? Why, it means that Betty has been chasing around through Central Park and attending theaters with an unknown man," replied Crawford.

Betty began to tremble, and was on

the verge of crying.

"Well, how was I to know he wasn't what he pretended to be?" she gasped.

"You should have been more careful," replied Crawford, with the cruel thoughtlessness of a brother. "You might have known the right Smith didn't have or couldn't afford to hire an automobile."

"I don't see how she could have figured all that out," snapped his wife. "She is not to blame. It is you. Smith is your friend. You claim you called him up and made arrangements with him about the theater, and he claims you did not. Which is right?"

"Well, I know as sure as I'm stand-

ing here that I called up and talked to Smith-"

Just then the telephone rang.

Crawford answered it.

"Hello! . . . Which Smith? . . . Oh, the other Smith . . . . Yes, I'm Crawford. . . . She's getting along very well, but before we go any further I want to know who you are and what your presumption of last night means. . . Yes, you told me before that you were Smith. . . . There's a whole lot more to tell, and don't try to be facetious. . . . How does it come that you met my sister at the Forrest Theater and—— Yes, sister! . . . S-i-s-t-e-r! No, it wasn't my wife at all—it was my sister, Miss Crawford. . . . Yes; miss."

After Crawford had shouted himself red in the face he paused while the other explained how he had been called up about six o'clock by somebody by the name of Crawford, and how, despite his efforts to rectify the mistake the telephone Central had made, the other continued to force upon him a pleasure he was unable to resist, and how, having nothing to do that evening, he had jumped at the chance of a little ad-

venture.

"Well, you are about the nerviest man I have ever talked to," continued Crawford, "but I see now it was all my fault. You are not to blame. I suppose I should have done the same thing in your shoes. Come up this evening and we'll shake hands. . . . What? . . . I don't know. Hold the line a minute."

He turned to Betty.

"Mr. Smith wants to know whether you will be able to take an automobile ride to-morrow."

Betty blushed furiously, and supposed he had better come up and see what her brother thought of him before she gave her answer.

Crawford turned again to the tele-

phone

"Her ankle is giving her some pain, and she is not quite sure whether she will be able to go out to-morrow or not. Come up to-night, and we'll see how she is then."

With a few more remarks, the conversation ceased. Just as Crawford turned from the telephone there came a knock

at the door. Upon opening it, he saw a messenger-boy bearing a pasteboard box

as large as himself.

It was for Betty, and soon the room was perfumed by the fragrance of the most costly roses money could purchase. There were three dozen of them. And pinned to one of the stems, in a neat little envelope, was the card of one Ralph J. Smith.

Betty handed it to her brother.

" Is that the name of your friend?"

"No, that's the name of yours. My Smith's first name is Fred."

Betty laughed.

"I tried to fool him, but it seems he

deceived me equally well."

"Yes," replied Crawford, "it appears to have been a sort of double deception."

Betty said nothing. She only looked at the card, and was glad she was miss and not a Mrs. Crawford.

### THE BEAT OF THE TEMPEST.

BY GILBERT P. COLEMAN.

Concerning a marvelous disappearance the solution of which almost proved the undoing of a newspaper man with ambitions.

JARRY LEMARE had wholly, unaccountably, -mysteriously disappeared. There could be no doubt of

Tom and I, who lived in the same apartment building—one of those old-fashioned red-brick houses that used to be residences when there was room in New York to reside—hadn't seen him for two days, a remarkable interim considering our intimacy.

We had knocked at the door repeatedly without result; we had pressed the knob of his electric bell in the vestibule; we had blown up through the speakingtube: we had even sent a postal card, thinking he might turn up and get it while we were away.

But it was no use. There was ab-

solutely no Harry.

Therefore, fearing the worst, though hoping for the best, we had thrown ourselves jointly against his hall door (the way you read about these things being done in the historical romances), andthe door didn't give with a crash.

It is rather prosaic, I must admit, but we went down to the janitor in the basement and got a key, and then had no difficulty in entering the apartmentnot knowing what horrible thing we

might find.

The front chamber, used as a combination library, parlor, and smoking-room (Harry, like Tom and myself, was a bachelor), we discovered to be in its usual condition; that is, a little upset,

with a generous quantity of pipe-ashes strewn over the surface of the table and on the floor, and numbers of books, magazines, and newspapers lying carelessly all over the place.

The bath-room, which we examined next, was also in fairly good order. Evidently nothing had happened there that could have caused Harry's sudden and mysterious disappearance.

But when we reached the bedroom we stared at each other in astonishment and

The place was a wreck. The bed, though sadly rumpled, had evidently not been slept in, as the covers were not turned down and the pillows seemed intact. The floor was fairly littered with all manner of personal effects-collars, cuffs, cravats, shirts, shoes, brushes, waistcoats, and odds and ends of cloth-

The drawers of every piece of furniture in the room that had drawers were open-in fact, two had been bodily removed and the contents spilled on the floor. The top of the bureau looked as if it had been swept by a tornado.

Everything of value had been removed, and of what remained not an

article was in its place.

The closet showed similar signs of wreckage. Half the things had been taken from the hooks and were lying on the floor, apparently thrown down by some person acting under the stress of intense excitement.

It was while I was investigating the closet that I heard an exclamation from Tom. Hurrying back into the room, I found him examining some dark spots on a towel.

Tom, it should be explained, is a newspaper man—a reporter rapidly making a name for himself on the New York Tempest—and naturally he felt in his element. I awaited the result of his examination anxiously, for Harry had been a dear friend of both of us. I felt sure that something awful had happened, and was not surprised, therefore, when Tom announced in a hollow voice:

" Blood."

It was indeed true. The splotches were evidently composed of clots of the vital fluid that had dried and assumed the usual rusty hue.

My heart sank within me. Poor, poor Harry! Evidently, he had been foully dealt with.

I remembered what a good fellow he had been—how devoted to us, how jolly and full of spirits, and such a fine, rousing companion, at least until he had fallen in love. That was about two months before, and as Harry, who never does—nor ever did, poor fellow—anything by halves, had fallen in head over heels, we hadn't seen much of him during that period.

But we were fond of him, just the same, and now to find that—

But a thought struck me, and I cheered up.

"Tom," I said, "nothing very serious could have happened to him, after all. If there had been a murder, his body would be here."

Tom looked at me indulgently, though I could see there was a slight tincture of contempt in his glance. But I am only a poor devil of a broker, and Tom, as I said, is a newspaper man with a growing reputation, so of course I couldn't be expected to possess his facility in matters of detection.

"My dear fellow," he said, "can't you use the evidence of your eyes? Don't you know what has happened? Just look around, and tell me what you see?"

I took another glance about the room, and repeated the result of my inventory.

"Everything is apset, in the first place," I said.

Tom nodded.

"Looks as if a cyclone had struck the room."

Tom looked impatient.

"What else?" he asked. "Do you observe that anything is missing?"

I hadn't thought of this before, and once more made a careful survey of the

"Well, I don't know just what Harry had," I replied after a careful scrutiny, "but there doesn't seem to be much gone. His clothes, I guess, are all here."

"You don't suppose this murderer came up here to remove a few pieces of clothing?" Tom spoke sarcastically. "Don't you see that everything of real value is gone—no money left, no silver, no watch, no jewelry or valuables, and yet Harry always had such things about him, and they must have been here with him last night when he came in."

I looked up at Tom admiringly.

"Sure," I said; "I never thought of that."

"Well, what else do you observe?"

Again I looked about carefully, determined this time to find some evidence of crime.

"There's the blood!" I remarked triumphantly.

Tom smiled.

"I think that was fairly obvious."

I wish he hadn't used that word "obvious." It is the word Sherlock Holmes is constantly throwing into the teeth of his friend Dr. Watson, and I didn't like to feel as cheap as I knew Dr. Watson must have felt when he heard it.

"But," Tom went on, not noticing my discomfiture, "you haven't observed the real clue. There is something missing more significant than the valuables and the money and the watch. I tell you, Dick, my boy, we've got a cinch."

There was something disagreeably gloating in Tom's voice. I didn't think he ought to gloat over the fact that he was discovering evidence that Harry had been murdered. It wasn't respectful.

However, for the fourth time I made a minute inspection of the room, but was unable to notice the absence of anything that might prove significant.

"Well," I said somewhat bruskly, "what is it?"

Tom waited for a moment, in order, I suppose, that his reply might have the proper dramatic effect, and then said, in a voice that was absolutely blood-curdling:

"The trunk!"

I looked hastily to the spot in the corner where Harry always kept his trunk, and, sure enough, it was gone. In an instant I grasped the full significance of Tom's suggestion.

"You don't mean," I said, speaking scarcely louder than a whisper—"you

can't mean that they have-"

"I mean, my dear fellow," interrupted Tom, "that we've providentially stumbled across the biggest beat in years. I'll have every paper in town skinned alive. I tell you, man, it's another case of *Tempest* first and the rest nowhere. This will make me the boss reporter of New York; that is, as soon as we trace the body and the murderer."

And then, on reflection, and as if he had realized the somewhat ghoulish nature of his ren.arks, he added: "Of course, there is nobody in the world sorrier than I am at Harry's death; but if he had to die, why, this was the most accommodating way he could have done it—that is, accommodating to me—and Harry was always a good friend of mine."

At this point, struck by a sudden recollection, I broke in:

"Tom, come to think of it, I heard some noises in Harry's room one night—just before we missed him, I believe. You know, I sleep right overhead."

Tom pricked up his ears.

"Yes," I continued, beginning to share some of the excitement that I knew he must feel, "I should have thought it was all a dream if you hadn't made that awfully gruesome suggestion about the trunk."

"Well, what did you hear?" Tom's voice was eager, and I began to feel

correspondingly important.

"Let me see," I said; "it was very vague, but I do remember hearing hurried steps in the room and the sound of voices."

" Well?"

"They were very low and cautious, at first, it seems to me now—and then I dreamed—at least, it all seemed a dream

until just now—that some one said, "Won't it shut down?"

Tom's face was fairly glowing with excitement.

"And then?"

"And then—well, you see, Tom, I really thought it was a dream—you know, I was at the club that night, and we had a lot of beer and cheese."

"Yes, yes," snapped Tom. "But can't you recall something else? You

must recall it."

For a moment I remained silent, in the effort to gather together the stray wisps of my memory. At first all was indistinct, but by earnest concentration things gradually became clearer.

"And after that one of the voices said—or I dreamed it said—you know, Tom, it was very late when I went to bed, and I had been to the——"

"Oh, hang where you had been," Tom almost shouted. "What did you hear?"

"Why, it seemed as if one of the voices said, 'Both of us get on top.'"

"'Both of us,'" repeated Tom, thoughtfully. "There were two of them in the job, then."

"'In the job'?" I repeated in perplexity. "Why do you say 'job'?"

"Why, can't you see," returned Tom, with a contempt which was gradually becoming habitual—"don't you see what was going on?"

I still looked puzzled.

"They were crowding the body into the trunk. It was a tight fit, for Harry was a pretty sizable lad, and they couldn't get the cover down. Hence the remarks you heard. And when they found it wouldn't shut easily they both got on top. It's as plain as day. Oh, what a cinch! Well, what else?"

Again I delved into the dim recesses of my memory, and after a struggle succeeded in unearthing another gem.

"It seemed as if everything was quiet for a while, and possibly I may have fallen asleep again. You know, Tom, I was powerfully sleepy, and hadn't got to bed before——"

"Will-you-kindly-go-on?"

Tom's words look polite on paper, but somehow he said them so slowly and deliberately that they seemed to grate on the ear.

"Well, after a silence during which,

as I said, I may have gone to sleep, I heard, or dreamed that I heard, Harry's hall door open, followed by the sound of heavy footsteps on the stairs."

"Of course—just what I expected,"

said Tom, with glee in his voice.

"And then I heard, or dreamed that I heard, a voice say in a low tone, 'Look out for the chandelier!'"

"Great," cried Tom, almost dancing in his ghoulish delight. "Oh, what a

cinch!'

"And after that," I went on, determined that I should not be scolded any further, and that my testimony should at least have a dramatic finish, "I heard—I didn't dream this time, I actually heard, for I was awake, and I knew I was awake—I heard, as I said——"

"Will-you-kindly-"

"Well," I jumped in, paying no attention to Tom's interruption, "I heard a sound as if some heavy object had been thrown into a wagon, and then I heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the asphalt. I remember now, I thought at the time it was the milk wagon."

"What direction, old man-just one

more clue-what direction?"

"I think it was east," I said, with some dignity, for I felt that Tom had treated me somewhat cavalierly, while all the time I had been trying to help him, "or," I added, on reflection, "perhaps it might have been west."

Tom cast on me a last, lingering glance of reproach mingled with exasperation, impatience, and disgust, and then, every professional instinct alive, thirsting for the glory that he knew was to be his, he darted from the room.

On coming home, that evening, I had hardly closed the door to my rooms when I heard a loud, excited bawling on the street. The sounds seemed to come from two men in the last throes of agonized vociferation. Straining my ears, I gathered the following intelligence:

"Uxtree! Uxtree! Here's yer Uxtry Tempest! All about the wow—wow—wow! Uxtree! Uxtree!

Uxtree!!"

Tom's story in the *Tempest!* His "beat" that was to make him famous!

I skipped down the steps four at a time, and rushing out on the street, succeeded, after an effort, in stopping one of the men in his mad career and purchased one of the "uxtrees" at the extortionate price of five cents. Then I hastened back to my room, where I could peruse Tom's story in seclusion.

Yes, there it was. Half the front of the paper was covered with this sensa-

tional announcement:

### TRUNK MYSTERY!

Harry Lemare, an Artist, Foully Slain in His Room and His Body Placed in a Trunk.

Trunk Then Removed and Still Missing.
Discovery Due to Vigilance of a

Tempest Reporter.

Then followed the account itself, in small type. I read it with absorbed interest, and could see at once that Tom hadn't wasted any of his opportunities.

Evidently, on reflection, he had seen many things that we both had failed to

see in the room before.

In the first place, poor Harry's apartment, which was but a modest one at best, as suited his moderate circumstances, was changed, by the magic of Tom's facile pen, into a chamber of regal luxury. There were divans, and rich tapestries, and valuable works of art; a carpet an inch thick, and, in short, everything that the most exacting nabob could possibly require.

Then, I never could have imagined Tom to possess such ingenuity in gathering details. I actually shuddered as I read minutely just how poor Harry had

met his fearful death.

It seemed that Tom had discovered a razor somewhere, and the deed had been done with this; and afterward, the body being too large for the trunk, Tom had caused the murderers to sever the head from the body.

I suppose it was all a matter of deduction, and couldn't help envying Tom his wonderful facility. It was easy to

see that his fame was assured.

Next, after the body had been securely packed into the trunk it had been conveyed down the stairs on the shoulders of one of the men. Tom grew precise and circumstantial at this point.

"The sound of the descending foot-

steps," he said, in his well-worded, easy-flowing narrative, "was distinctly heard by Mr. Richard Huddlestone, who occupies apartments directly over those of the deceased. Mr. Huddlestone is a prominent and influential Wall Street man, whose testimony is, of course, beyond question."

Well, well! Now, that was good of Tom. "Prominent and influential." I thrust out my chest a trifle, and con-

tinued:

"With equal distinctness Mr. Huddlestone heard the sound of the trunk as, with its gruesome contents, it was deposited in the wagon that was waiting at the door."

Further reading disclosed the information that the murderers had undoubtedly designed to sink their burden in the waters of the harbor. Just where they sank it, the *Evening Tempest* assured its readers, would be revealed in a very short time, as a full force of competent reporters were engaged on the case.

The account closed with an elaborate theory of the murder, in which it was convincingly shown that the motive was burglary, and that the body had been removed in order to conceal the evidence

of the more serious crime.

For two weeks after this I saw very little of Tom. He came home late and went out early. I learned afterward that he had been put in charge of the case, and that by virtue of the enormous "beat" the Tempest had scored over the other papers he had already had a very handsome rise in salary.

If he could produce the body within a stipulated time he was to be made dramatic or musical critic, at his discretion. In case he succeeded in laying his hands on the murderers, he was to be-

come foreign correspondent.

But at the end of two weeks nothing had been discovered. The *Tempest* had scoured the waters of the bay, and had had tugs busy dragging the bottom ever since the day of the murder, all without result.

And in spite of the newspaper's efforts to keep up public interest, it was easy to see that the matter had become a nine days' wonder. I could easily observe that Tom was suffering from a severe nervous strain. He grew thin, and pale,

and uncommunicative. The only words I could get out of him had reference to the crime.

"The body," he said repeatedly; "I

must have the body."

In fact, he became so absolutely uncanny that I eventually found myself avoiding him.

One night, at the end of the two weeks, he came to my room more dejected than I had ever seen him.

"Would you believe it," he said, throwing himself into a chair, "those chumps down at the office are trying to queer me? They have the nerve to intimate," he added indignantly, "that I have been on a false scent, and that I haven't shown any real proof of a crime."

He sat silent for a moment, brooding over his wrongs, and then burst out more

vehemently than ever.

"Why, the thing is as plain as the nose on your face. Look at the evidence. The room all upset, Harry's valuables all gone, the blood on the towel, the missing trunk, and above all, the disappearance of Harry himself. I tell you, there can be no question of it. He simply couldn't disappear for two weeks without any trace of him turning up.

"Besides, there isn't any motive. And even if he had tried to hide himself away in this city, which would be the obvious place to hide if he really wanted to conceal himself, he couldn't possibly do it, with the watch I've been keeping. Every one of his haunts has been covered. I've had men at his studio every day—at his club, at the hotels, at his friends' houses.

"And don't you suppose he would have given us a tip if he had still been alive? Sure, he would. I tell you, Dick, he's dead! He simply must be dead—deader than a door-nail."

There was a sound of the street-door shut with a bang, followed by a rapid approach of footsteps on the stairs. Then, in a moment, the door of my room burst open, and there before us, in the flesh, living, breathing, and with his head firmly fastened to his shoulders, as in days of yore, stood Harry Lemare, late deceased.

Surprised is too mild a word. I was simply paralyzed. The thing was mirac-

ulous-beyond the pale of the wildest

imagination.

As for Tom, I never saw so many conflicting emotions depicted at one time on a single countenance. Perhaps the predominating expression was chagrin.

It was plain to see that he regarded this phenomenon as a crowning indignity.

Harry, however, was cheerful, even boisterous, and was the first to speak.

"Well, boys, you don't seem very glad

to see me."

This brought me out of my stupor. No matter how he had contrived to escape from that trunk with his head in its normal position, there could be no doubt that he had done so, and that this was, in very fact, our own old Harry Lemare.

I rushed over and seized both his hands in a firm grip, though I caught myself inadvertently glancing at that part of the neck where a murderer would be most likely to apply a razor for be-

heading purposes.

Tom, also, shook himself together, after a powerful effort, and greeted Harry with a somewhat perfunctory clasp of the haud, after which, in a tone that seemed to come from far away, as one would talk in his sleep, he murmured:

"The body! Harry's body, and alive

at that!"

"Alive?" returned Harry. "You never saw a man more alive in your life." His face was beaming all over with a sort of comprehensive grin. "Boys, congratulate me."

"What?" I said. "You're engaged

at last?"

"Worse than than-I'm married."

Tom tottered back into his seat, quite undone.

"Married?" he whispered hoarsely.
"I thought—I hoped—that is, we all

thought-you were-murdered!"

"Well, not exactly," said Harry, with a chuckle, "unless you care to consider the two words as synonymous. I know all about it—got a bunch of papers when I came off the boat. I tell you, boys, it was great—never expected to make such a stir in the world."

"But where on earth have you been hiding?" ejaculated Tom. "Have you

been in New York?"

Harry shook his head.

"In Mexico, Canada, West Indies?"
Again Harry shook his head and

laughed.

"Boys, it's all over now, and I can tell you all about it. In the first place, you may have heard me speak of a certain young woman by the name of Mary Edgeworth?"

That being the name of his sweetheart, we had heard him mention it, during the two months prior to his disappearance,

perhaps several thousand times.

"Well, it was all owing to her. The night I left she sent me a wire saying that her folks—you know, for some unexplained reason they had a strong objection to yours truly—well, she sent me a wire saying that her folks were about to smuggle her off to Europe for a tour of the Continent, thinking that might cause her to forget her troubles. I didn't think it would myself, but determined to take no chances. The steamer—one of the Blue Star Line—was sailing early in the morning, and I had less than an hour to pack up and get aboard."

"I nabbed Joe, the expressman down at the corner—and by the way, Tom, you've had the life scared out of that chap for two weeks. I met him on the way up, and he said that he's been living in a cellar ever since I went, for fear of being arrested for cutting off my head and throwing my body into the harbor."

I began to see a light.

Tom was the picture of a crestfallen man, and I, beginning to see the humor of the situation, and remembering how he had been lording it over me all during the "mystery," smiled grimly.

"We came up to the rooms," continued Harry, "and I tell you, we made things hustle. I told Joe what to throw into the trunk, while I tried to shave myself, with my hand shaking like a leaf. Must have cut myself in a dozen places."

"The blood on the towel!" I remarked, with some slight trace of tri-

umph in my tones.

"I grabbed everything I though' would need——"

"Mysterious disappearance of money, valuables, and watch," I interpolated, again in a tone calculated to add to sum total of Tom's discount ture.

"Threw in two or a ... : its, and

whatever else I could find handy, and in my haste got in so much that we had the devil's own time fastening down the

"That's where the murderers-two of them-found that you were quite a sizable lad to crowd into such small quarters and had to cut off your head." Tom hadn't spared me, and now it was my

innings.

"Well, I just got aboard in time. They didn't want to let me on, at first, without a lot of red tape, but it was late, and as I insisted, they finally gave in. I took a stateroom, second cabin, and Mary and I had plenty of opportunity to ar-

range matters during the trip.

"When we got to the other side we easily gave them the slip at Liverpool, hunted up an obliging parson, and were spliced in no time. Then we took the very first available steamer sailing for New York. Just got in this morning, and sent a cable to the old folks asking forgiveness and a blessing."

Whereupon Harry jumped up out of his chair and performed a few fancy steps, indicative of a generally cheerful

and benignant disposition.

But when I looked over at Tom I really felt sorry. He was sunk all in a heap in his chair, the very picture of ab-

ject misery.

I knew what this meant for him. His paper would "call him down." Tempest would be obliged to come out with explanations and apologies, and Tom, being responsible for it all, would be the man to suffer. And this in spite of all the enthusiasm and energy and genius he had expended on the case.

After all, though I was glad to see

Harry and delighted to know of his good fortune, from a certain point of view it was, perhaps, rather unfortunate that he had not been beheaded and stuffed into a trunk, even as the Tempest, by means of its beautiful big head-lines, for the past two weeks had been proclaiming was the case.

The next day, however, when I returned from the office and was dressing for supper, I heard the now familiar cry of the stentorian duet on the street:

"Uxtra, uxtree! Uxtra, uxtree! All about the wow-wow-wow! Ux-

tra, uxtree!"

As before, I hurried down-stairs, and rushing out of doors, caught one of the men as he was passing the house and again purchased a Tempest.

I did not glance at it until I reached my room. Then, in even more gorgeous and thrilling head-lines than before. I read how Tom had been vindicated.

Trunk Mystery Solved!

Another Exclusive Discovery Made by

the Tempest!

Harry Lemare, the Artist, Appears at His Lodgings and Is Instantly Recognized by Our Reporter.

Problem Cleared Up.

Victim Had Gone to Europe to Get

This Newspaper's Theories All Prove to Be Correct Except that There Was No Murder.

And I was rejoiced to learn afterward that Tom, even though he was not made musical or dramatic critic, or sent as a correspondent to Europe, was, in recognition of his enthusiasm and genius, retained by the Tempest, as a man of great promise and exceptional enterprise.

# HOME, SWEET HOME.

BY LEE BERTRAND.

The surprise a returning traveler intended to give "the folks," and how it came to assume gigantic proportions with boomerang trimmings.

A S the big steamship "hove to" alongside her Boston wharf, and brawnyarmed men made her fast with stout ropes and ran gangplanks from her decks to the pier, I could not refrain from chuckling.

Observing which, a genial fellow passenger turned to me and remarked: "Glad to get home, young man, I see. You're quite right. I share your enthusiasm. After all, there is no place like home, is there?"

"You just bet your life there isn't," I replied, with emphasis.

"Been away long, may I ask?" he

inquired.

'Six months," I replied. "Been doing Europe, you know. Visited nearly every place worth seeing. Seen enough. Glad to get back."

"Ha!" he exclaimed sympathetically. "Expect anybody to meet you here at

the dock?"

" No," I answered. " My folks live in New York. They don't expect me home for another month. That's why I'm chuckling. I'm going to play a good joke on them. Can't help laughing every time I think of it."

The old fellow smiled his interest.

" Might I make bold enough to ask

what this joke is?" he said.

He was one of those inquisitive little men with a penchant for "butting into" other people's business. But I was in the mood to humor him. I hate to keep a

good joke to myself.

"You see, it's like this," I explained. "I'm returning home unexpectedly. My mother, father, and two sisters haven't the slightest idea that I'm on this side of the Atlantic. Consequently, they'll go to bed to-night at eleven o'clock, the same as usual. I've got the key of the front door in my pocket. I'm going to take the train to New York. I'll arrive about midnight, I guess.

"Then I'm going to let myself unobtrusively into the house, steal up-stairs to my bedroom, and spend the rest of the night there without any of them knowing that I'm on hand. In the morning I shall appear at the breakfast-table in the most casual way. You can imagine the surprise it will be to all of them. Great

scheme, isn't it?"

The old fellow chuckled his apprecia-

"It will be an excellent joke," he agreed. "I wish I could be there to see that scene at the breakfast-table tomorrow morning. Here's my card, sir. Would you mind dropping me a line to let me know how it turns out? I dearly love a harmless little joke of that sort."

He handed me his pasteboard, and we cordially shook hands and parted. few minutes afterward I saw him clasped in the embrace of a nice-looking gravhaired old lady who seized him as soon as he stepped off the gangplank.

The majority of my fellow passengers were being similarly handled by enthusiastic relatives and friends on the pier. I could not help sighing as I observed this fact.

Stepping off an ocean steamship without finding a soul on shore to welcome you has a depressing effect upon one's spirits. I watched the joyous welcome given to my fellow passengers with a pang of envy.

I almost regretted then that I had not sent the folks a telegram notifying them of my home-coming, so that I, too, might have received a score of hearty hugs. But when I thought of the welcome I should receive on the morrow, and the delighted surprise with which my unexpected appearance at the family breakfast-table would be hailed, I smiled again.

After all, the joke was worth the sacrifice. So, after giving explicit directions to the expressman as to the forwarding of my baggage, I bought a railway ticket to New York, and in a very short space of time was speeding toward dear old Manhattan Isle as fast as steam

could carry me.

My father had lived in the same house for several years, and as I jumped off the Eighth Avenue car at Eighty-Fourth Street and walked along the old familiar

street I felt in great spirits,

Verily, it was good to be home again. The gaieties of Paris, the splendors of Rome, the rush and roar of London-all of these were very fascinating, but none of them could cause the blood to surge through my veins as did the sight of that block of brownstone houses.

I stopped before the familiar stoop and fumbled in my pocket for the street-

door key.

I could picture to myself exactly how the interior of the old house would look. Every piece of furniture, every hanging and drapery, was characteristic of my mother's delicate hand and artistic taste.

Doubtless our dear old dog, Rover, would be there to welcome me. thought made me apprehensive. Would he bark joyfully as I stepped inside, and thereby arouse the family and spoil the whole plan?

But I remembered instantly that Rover never barked except when strangers entered. He was a splendidly trained house-dog. Reassured by this reflection, I inserted the key in the lock.

I was about to turn it, when I heard a heavy footstep ascending the steps, and I turned to confront a burly policeman, who was looking at me very suspiciously.

"What are you doing here?" he de-

manded gruffly.

"Doing here?" I laughed, quite at my ease. "Why, unlocking the door, of

course."

"Unlocking the door?" he repeated, and I noticed that while his one hand tightly clenched his night-stick the other was clutching the revolver in his hippocket. "What right have you to unlock that door, young feller?"

"Every right," I answered goodhumoredly. "You see, this happens to

be my home. I live here."

"Humph!" he exclaimed, apparently unconvinced. "Got anything about you to prove it?"

"Here's some of my visiting-cards," I replied, taking out my leather card-case.

He seized the card almost ungraciously, and read aloud:

MR. THOMAS CRARY, JR.

of West Eighty-Fourth Street.

Then his manner changed. I noticed that the grip of his hand upon his night-stick relaxed somewhat.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said apologetically. "You see, I'm new on this post, and I didn't know you. As you are doubtless aware, there's been lots of burglaries on this block of late, and the captain has warned us to be careful. No offense intended, sir; I hope there's been none taken."

"Certainly not," I replied. "You were quite right to be careful. I assure you that we appreciate it. You're a good policeman. Good night, officer."

"Good night, sir," he sang out, so loudly that I feared he would disturb

some of the family and thereby spoil my little joke.

But the family slept on peacefully. Only Rover heard me come in, and he came rushing up-stairs to receive me, prancing around me like a creature possessed, trying to perform the physically impossible feat of licking my nose and my feet at the same time, and wagging his stump of a tail in a perfect frenzy of welcome.

I remember thinking, at the time, that if that policeman could have witnessed the warmth with which that dog received me he would have been thoroughly assured that I was no intruder.

Despite his unmistakable joy, however, the dear old dog did not let out a single bark. As I have said, he was too well trained for that.

I cordially patted Rover's head, and made much of him, and as he seemed determined to follow me up-stairs to my bedroom, I coaxed him into the parlor and closed the door on him.

Then I softly crept up-stairs to my own room, on the second floor front.

It made me feel good to be in that familiar apartment again. I had not seen that comfortable-looking old-fashioned wooden bedstead for six months.

The lace counterpane was my mother's own handiwork. I had always admired it. The pictures on the wall were so familiar to me that I could have closed my eyes and described minutely the scenes they portrayed.

Nothing had been changed. My room was exactly as I had left it, six months

before.

I was undressing, with the intention of going to bed immediately, when I heard voices in the street below and the sound of approaching footsteps. I could distinguish the voice of a girl and that of a man, and apparently they were both very merry, for they laughed a great deal.

I noted that the girl's laugh appeared

to be very musical.

Their footsteps came to a halt as they reached our house, and I heard the girl say: "Thank you very much, Mr. Holt; I have had a most delightful evening."

"Not at all," said the man's voice, and I observed that he spoke quite soulfully. "Let me thank you, Miss Helen, for graciously conferring the favor of your company upon me. I assure you I shall never forget this night. Can you

get in all right?"

"Oh, yes," I heard the girl reply. "I have my key with me, you know. If you will be so kind, I will ask you to open the door for me. Sometimes it is rather difficult to turn the key in the

"Certainly," said the man's voice. "Where is the kev?"

And then I heard the girl utter an ex-

clamation of dismay.

"Good Heavens!" she cried: "I've I had tied it in a corner of my handkerchief, and-I've lost the handkerchief."

"Holy smoke!" exclaimed the man.

"How will you get in?"

"Oh, it's all right," the girl replied.
"I'll ring the bell. I hate to disturb anybody at this late hour, but it can't be

helped.'

Thoroughly interested, I peeped out of my bedroom window, and to my amazement discovered that this conversation was taking place at the foot of the stoop of our house.

"Who the deuce can they be?" I muttered. "The girl apparently thinks she lives here. She isn't a servant. Her looks and her voice proclaim that fact. She isn't one of my sisters. Who the deuce can she be?"

I had just about decided that the girl lived next door and was merely standing outside our stoop, when our front-door bell rang, and hastily donning my clothes, I hurried down-stairs.

As I opened the front door I was amazed to find how very pretty the girl was at close view. She was dressed in white from head to foot, and she wore

the most bewitching of hats.

As the door opened she turned to her companion, who stood at the bottom of the stoop, and called: "It's all right, Mr. Holt! The door is open! Good night, and thank you a thousand times!"

Then she turned to me with a pleasant

"So sorry to disturb you," she murmured. "I lost my key, you see, and couldn't have got in otherwise. It was very good of you to come down."

I stared at her in amazement.

"Pardon me," I stammered at length. "Aren't you making a mistake in the house? This is number ninety-six."

"Of course it is," she replied, with a laugh. "I'm stopping here, you know." Then noticing my look of astonishment, she added: "When did you arrive?"
"Early this morning," I gasped.

"Oh, that accounts for it," she said confidently. "That's why we haven't met before, I mean."

And apparently thinking that this was quite sufficient explanation, she brushed past me and stepped lightly up the car-

peted stairs.

"Well, I'll be hanged if this doesn't beat the band!" I exclaimed as I saw her go straight and without the slightest hesitation into my sister Ella's bedroom.

And then a light dawned upon me.

"Why, of course!" I exclaimed. "How stupid of me not to have guessed it before! She must be a girl friend of Ella's, and she's stopping at the house for a time. What a peach she is, too! Of course, Ella will introduce me in the morning. I can see that this home-coming is going to be even more pleasant than I had imagined."

And with this cheering reflection I closed the street-door and returned to my bedroom. This time I managed to get undressed and into bed without interruption, and soon was fast asleep.

I do not know exactly how long I had slept when I was awakened by a noise in

my room.

I sat up in bed thoroughly awake, and felt for the revolver which, traveling or at home, I always kept under my pillow.

The room was in darkness, but I could plainly hear somebody moving about, and I crooked my finger around the trigger of my revolver expectantly.

I was about to call out "Who's there?" and put an end to the suspense, when suddenly I heard the sound of a safety-match being struck, and as it flamed up I saw that the intruder was a

tall young man.

Apparently without noticing my presence, he coolly proceeded to light the gas. This done, his glance traveled in my direction, and as he saw me sitting upright in bed, watching him closely, he started backward, uttering a sharp exclamation of alarm.

Quick as a flash I had him covered with my revolver.

"I warn you that it's fully loaded," I said calmly. "The slightest movement on your part will cause it to go off."

"I won't move," he hastily assured me.
"I won't move a muscle, sir. I surrender unconditionally. For Heaven's sake, don't handle that gun so carelessly."

His teeth were actually chattering. I looked at him contemptuously, for I like

to see grit—even in a burglar.

"You're a pretty sort of a fellow to come bothering folks at this hour of the night, aren't you?" I said scornfully. "You don't deserve to be shown any mercy. You ought to be shot dead as you stand trembling there, you wretched coward!"

As I said the words I waved the re-

volver menacingly.

"Please—please keep that thing still," he whimpered. "It will go off, in a

minute, if you're not careful."

"It will go off in less than a minute if you're not careful," I corrected him. "Keep your voice down, you scoundre!! Do you want to arouse the whole house?"

"I won't arouse anybody," he assured me in a whisper. "I'll do anything you say, sir. I'm entirely in your hands. For Heaven's sake, tell me what you

want of me and let me go."

"Let you go?" I remarked, with a low laugh. "I rather guess not. You and I are going to take a little walk, my friend—after I have gone through the formality of putting on a few clothes."

"A little walk!" he gasped. "Where

to, sir?"

"Oh, I guess you'll have no difficulty in recognizing the place when we ar-

rive," I sneered.

"See here," I added convincingly; "I'm willing to admit that it isn't an easy thing for a man to put on his trousers and coat and at the same time keep a fellow covered with a pistol. Nevertheless, I'm going to try to accomplish the feat. Don't attempt any monkey business while I'm dressing, or this little scene is liable to have a fatal ending."

"I won't move a muscle," he said.

"You'd better not," I assured him

Despite the fact that I had only one free hand, I managed to put on enough clothes to satisfy the conventionalities.

"Now march," I said, pressing the muzzle of the revolver against the small of his back. "And if you make any poise going down-stairs you'll look more like a porous plaster than a human being."

I was anxious to get him out of the house without arousing the folks, for I knew my mother would be scared out of her wits if she realized that there was a

burglar on the premises.

He went down that staircase with the quietness of a mouse. I opened the front door, and gently closed it after us. On the corner we met my friend the policeman.

"What's this?" exclaimed the bluecoat, in amazement, as his eyes caught

the gleam of my revolver.

"Bold, bad burglar," I replied, with a grin. "I caught him red-handed in

my room."

"You did, eh?" said the patrolman.
"Good work, sir. Of course, you're willing to come to the station-house and make a complaint?"

"Of course," I assented. "Better see if he's armed, officer. I forgot to look."

The patrolman proceeded to pat the prisoner's pockets in search of a concealed weapon, a process technically known in the police department as "frisking."

"He's not armed," he remarked, and thus assured, I restored my trusty re-

volver to my coat-pocket.

Seeing which act the prisoner, a look of intense relief on his white face, turned excitedly to the policeman, and pointing to me, cried hastily:

"Seize him quick! He's either a

crazy man or a burglar!"

At which statement the policeman and

I laughed derisively.

"Those bluffs don't go," said the officer, seizing him roughly by the coatcollar. "To the station-house for yours, as quick as you can march."

Arrived at the police station, we confronted the sergeant behind the desk.

"What have we here?" inquired that worthy listlessly.

"Burglar." replied the policeman. "This gentleman is the complainant. He caught him in his room at ninetysix West Eighty-Fourth Street - the block where all the burglaries have been occurring of late, sergeant."

The sergeant looked at our prisoner

almost affectionately.

"So glad to see you here," he remarked sweetly. "We've been expecting you for some time, Mr. Burglar."

"Sergeant," cried the fellow, pointing frenziedly at me, "that fellow has a gun in his coat-pocket. I'm afraid to open my mouth while it's in his possession. Take it away from him, so that he can't harm me, and I will explain everything to you."

With a scornful smile I handed my

revolver to the sergeant.

"There," said I accommodatingly. "The gentleman from Sing Sing has the floor."

"Sergeant," cried the prisoner, "this man here is either crazy or a criminal. I'm inclined to believe that he is the former. I am no burglar. My name is Robert Watson. I live at ninety-six West Eighty-Fourth Street. I came home late to-night, and when I got to my bedroom I found this fellow in my bed. He was holding a revolver at my head.

"I thought, at first, that he was a burglar, and had had the effrontery to go to sleep in my bed after robbing the house. But, seeing that he handed me over to this officer and had me brought here, I am now inclined to believe that he is a lunatic who has escaped from

some asylum."

"What a pretty story!" I remarked, with a scornful laugh.

The sergeant grinned and turned to

the prisoner.

"Did I understand you to say that you live at ninety-six West Eighty-Fourth Street?" he inquired.
"Yes, sir. That is to say, I board

there," he answered.

At this reply a horrible thought entered my mind. Was it possible that during my six months' absence from home my family had seen fit to take in a boarder? If such was the case, I was indeed in a terrible pickle.

"What is the name of the family you board with?" I inquired a little shakily.

" Peters." he answered readily, and at his words my self-assurance returned.

"You audacious scamp!" I cried. "That isn't the name at all. If you will take the trouble to consult that directory on your desk, sergeant, you will find number ninety-six West Eighty-Fourth Street is occupied by Thomas Crary. I am his son, Thomas Crary, Junior."

The sergeant did as directed.

"Sure enough," he announced. "Here's the name and address. settles this fellow's pretensions. course, I didn't place much credence in his story, anyway. Still, I like to be sure. Officer, search the prisoner."

"No! No!" cried the fellow hastily.

"I object to being searched."

And he struggled frantically.

"If you're wise you'll keep still, confound you!" hissed the policeman, as he threw his prisoner forcibly against the rail and clutched him by the throat with one hand while he went through his pockets with the other.

From the breast-pocket of the man's coat he pulled forth a handful of yellow

"Ha!" he cried triumphantly. "Just look at these, sergeant! Pawn-tickets. And for jewelry, too! Here's a ticket for a watch-a ticket for a scarfpin-a ticket for a dress suit—a ticket for a ring," etc., etc. "This fellow must be an old hand at the game."

"It was my own stuff. I had a right to pawn it. I was broke on account of playing the races," gasped the prisoner,

now white to the lips.

"Your own stuff, eh?" sneered the sergeant. "We'll look up the pawnshops, my friend, and trace the real owners of all those articles. I'll wager we'll have a score of complainants against you before we get through. No more talk, now. It won't do you any good. Officer, take him back."

And as they dragged the unfortunate wretch to a cell the sergeant turned to me and remarked: "Don't fail to be in court in the morning, Mr. Crary."

"I'll be there," I said. "I don't intend to let up on the scoundrel, I assure

As I walked back to the house with the intention of returning to bed I smiled to think of the interesting yarn I should be able to spin to my folks at the break-fast-table in the morning.

"It will be a day of surprises for

them," I chuckled.

"First of all, they'll be surprised at my appearance at breakfast. And then, after they've got over that surprise, I shall horrify them by informing them that while they were peacefully sleeping in their beds a desperate burglar was prowling all over the house. I wonder what Ella's pretty friend will say when she hears of my courage. I'll bet she'll admire—"

I stopped short, suddenly overcome by

a staggering thought.

Was that pretty girl who had lost her key a friend of my sister Ella, as I had supposed? Was it not possible that she was an accomplice of the burglar, and that she let him into the house? Still more startling thought: was it not possible that that girl was none other than the burglar himself?

I had read of crooks assuming female disguises. Was it possible that I had been fool enough to open the door for that burglar and let him into the house, thinking that he was a pretty girl?

thinking that he was a pretty girl?

But by the time I had reached the house I had dismissed these startling presumptions from my mind as too ab-

surd for consideration.

That girl certainly was no man in disguise, and, moreover, a girl with a face like that could not be a burglar's accomplice.

No; undoubtedly she was Ella's friend, as I had at first surmised.

I climbed the stairs to my room, and, undressing myself, went to bed.

This time I was allowed to sleep uninterruptedly. When I awoke the sun was peeping in at my window.

My watch had stopped, but I guessed that it must be near breakfast-time, so I dressed carefully and went down-stairs.

A servant-girl was laying the cloth in the dining-room. She was a new girl, and she did not know me.

"I suppose the family will be down soon?" I ventured.

"Yes, sir," she answered politely. "Breakfast at eight o'clock, you know, sir."

"All right," I said. "I'm going into the garden. Don't say anything to the folks about my being here. I want to surprise them."

"Yes, sir," she answered smilingly.

My father always prided himself upon his garden. Most New York folks allow their back yards to go to waste, but my father had planted in our few feet of ground all sorts of flowers and bushes.

I stepped out at the back door and into the yard, sniffing the fragrance of the rose-bushes as I strolled about.

At the other end of the yard I espied something that somehow or other made my heart beat more rapidly.

It was Ella's friend, the pretty girl

who had lost her key.

She was leaning over a geranium-bed, and arose hastily as I approached.

"Good morning," I said boldly.

"Hope you slept well."

"Yes, thanks," she replied sweetly.
"I'm sorry that I had to disturb your rest. I can't think how I lost that hateful key."

"Don't mention it," I rejoined. "It was a pleasure to me to come down and

let you in."

"Aren't these geraniums pretty?" she remarked, apparently seeking a diversion. "I just love geraniums."

"Let me pluck a few for you," I said eagerly, and stooped down with that

intention.

"Oh, no!" she cried, in horror.
"Don't do that. It's against the rules of the house to pick the flowers. They're very cranky on that point."

"I'll brave their anger," I declared smilingly, as I plucked the sweet flowers and offered her a nosegay. "I guess they won't be very angry with me. I'm

the prodigal son, you see."

She looked at me in a startled sort of way, and was about to say something, but just then the breakfast-bell rang and we both hurried into the house.

"Don't say anything as we enter the room," I whispered in her ear. "I want to surprise them, you know. They don't expect me home."

She looked at me, plainly puzzled.

Was it possible that this girl did not guess who I was? Oh, well, if such was the case she would be enlightened as to my identity in a very few seconds.

I smiled as I thought of the pleasant scene that was about to ensue—the shouts.

of surprise, the hugs, the kisses, the re-

proaches, the gratulations.

As we reached the dining-room door I heard the hum of voices and the clatter of plates within. Evidently, the family was already gathered around the table.

I moved aside to let my companion precede me, and then I stepped into the

room.

My hour of triumph had arrived.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!" I cried, and then I uttered an ex-

clamation of startled surprise.

The little group gathered around the table was not my family. There was an old man and an old woman, and a young man and a young woman, and I did not know a single one of them.

For a second it flashed across my mind

that I must be in the wrong house.

The dining-room was exactly as I had left it six months previously. The same furniture, the same pictures on the wall, the same bric-à-brac on the shelf. I knew every inch of it. Undoubtedly it was our dining-room.

For a moment I stood there looking at these strange people out of startled eyes, while they returned my stare with in-

terest

Finally the old woman broke the spell

by speaking.

"What is it you want, young man?" she inquired pleasantly. "If you desire to engage a room, please step up-stairs into the parlor. I'll see you after breakfast."

"Engage a room!" I gasped. "What on earth should I want to engage a room for? I live here. This is my home. My name is Thomas Crary, Junior, madam. Will you kindly tell me where I will find my mother and father, and Ella and Maude, and what all you people are doing here in our dining-room?"

"He's crazy," whispered the young

man at the table.

"Send for the police," muttered the old man.

The pretty girl who had lost her doorkey uttered no word, but she looked very scared.

The old lady smiled.

"You say that your name is Thomas Crary, Junior," she said. "I think I understand. You're Mrs. Crary's only son, young man, are you not? You've

been touring Europe the last few

"Exactly, madam," I replied. "Will you have the goodness to tell me what you've done with my mother and father and sisters?"

"Your mother and father and sisters don't live here any more," answered the old lady gently. "They sublet their home to us a month ago. This house is now Mrs. Peters's Select Boarding Establishment."

"Mrs. Peters's Select Boarding Establishment!" I gasped. "But where are my folks, madam? What has become of them? They did not write me a single word about taking this strange step."

"I believe your folks are in Europe. Your father's health ran down, and his physician advised a long foreign trip. Your family decided to spend a few years abroad, and so they sublet this

house to us."

"But why didn't they write?" I demanded dazedly. "Why didn't they let me know?"

"If I remember rightly," said the old lady, "Mrs. Crary told me that she expected to meet her only son on the other side, and that they wanted to surprise him."

"Well, apparently I missed them on the other side, but they've certainly surprised me, all right," I exclaimed; and then I began to laugh uproariously.

"What's the matter?" asked every-

body anxiously.

"The joke isn't on me," I roared.
"It's on one of your boarders, Mrs.
Peters. I had him locked up last night
for trying to enter this house. He's in
jail now. The police are going to send
him away as a desperate burglar."

"One of my boarders locked up!" gasped Mrs. Peters. "You don't mean

Mr. Robert Watson, do you?"

"If I remember rightly, he tried to make the police believe that was his name," I replied.

At my words the pretty girl who had lost her key let out a loud scream.

"Oh, my brother—my poor brother Robert—locked up in a horrid prison!" she shrieked, and promptly fainted away.

I left that house with as little ceremony as possible.

## THE LETTERS MARKED XX.

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN.

A mystery that piqued the curiosity of even a professional detective during a period which he had resolved to devote to rest and recuperation.

DR. JORDAN regarded his demitasse and reflected silently that the Union Club was about the only place in Craftsburg where one could obtain palatable black coffee.

Then his thoughts swerved about, and

a little smile appeared on his lips.

"So you really have developed into a full-blooded sleuth-hound, Dick?" he remarked softly.

Bridger, the detective, shook his head

rather hopelessly.

"I really have," he said, "and I'm wondering how many more times it is going to be necessary to remind you that I am here for a little vacation—that I journeyed to this pleasant city to see you, among the other noteworthy sights, upon the sole condition that my occupation shouldn't be discussed."

" Bosh!"

"No bosh about it, Tom. I came up for a couple of weeks of real rest. I came up to be free from the several hundred varieties of crime and mystery for a little while."

"But the mysteries you tackle must

be so fascinating, you know-"

"They are—very," said the detective dryly, "but you get tired of them, just the same. I've left mystery to the folks down in New York who are trying to see me, and who are spending their time wondering where the deuce I've gone."

"But still-"

"Look here, Tommy! Do you suppose I came up and registered as 'Richard Standish' for sheer amusement? Aren't you aware that I have gone to the length of sailing under my middle name for the solitary purpose of not being found until my brain-matter has worked off some of the effects of several years of robbery and murder? All right, then. Let's drop it and talk about some of the people you butcher in the course of the day's work. How about that man whose leg—"

"Drat his leg!" rejoined the doctor unfeelingly. "I'd rather talk about your work, Dick."

"In spite of my frank aversion to the

subject?"

"Exactly," grinned Jordan.

He had left the university medical school in the same class that witnessed the taking of Bridger's law degree. They had been chums for four years then, and no formality could exist between them.

For a minute or two the men looked at each other. Bridger shrugged his

shoulders.

"My dear and respected Dr. Jordan," he remarked wearily, "I seem to recall that you rarely stuck to a thing without a purpose, and I seem to recall, too, that you had the devil's own persistence. What the deuce is it you want me to tell you about? Murder—arson—bank robberies—freight wrecks?"

"Not necessarily."

"Well, then?"

Jordan smiled at his cigar.

"Dick, I know you'll be tickled to death. I—well, I was thinking of consulting you about a mystery of my own—free of charge!"

"Oh, Lord! Do they have mysteries even in the beautiful city of Crafts-

burg?"

"They do, and I think it has been downright decent of me not to mention this one in the four days you've been here, my friend. Will you hear about it?"

"Have I any choice?"

"You have not!" said the doctor.

He felt about his pockets for a little, and finally produced half a dozen letters. The envelopes were of the conventional stamped pattern issued by the government; the stamps had been canceled.

Jordan sorted them over, and finally tossed one across the dinner-table.

"There! What do you make of it?" Bridger took it up and looked it over

rather indifferently.

"Ordinary stamped envelope-correctly addressed to yourself, and mailed at Chicago a couple of weeks ago. It has evidently gone through the mails and been opened by yourself. Therefore," he concluded, with mock gravity, "I deduce, Tom, that you have received a letter within the past month."

"Anything else peculiar about the en-

velope?"

"Um—no. Yes, there is, too. Your correspondent has marked the upper left-hand corner with a double x."

"That's it!"

"Well-why did he do it?"

"Tell me who he is and what he's writing about, and I may be able to answer that question. Read the letter, and see what you make of that. Most of the mystery is inside."

Bridger spread before him the half-

sheet of note-paper and droned:

"DEAR J.: Everything O. K. First thousand to-day easy. More to-morrow. Don't try to write-will keep you posted. Worked well.

"Um-um?" remarked the detective, looking up. "Who is the gentleman, Tom?"

"That is precisely what I want to know."

"But his letter is directed to you, and he addressed you pretty familiarly as

'Dear I.'"

"I know that perfectly, my dear boy, but I haven't a ghost of a notion about 'F' or his identity. In fact, after a good deal of thought, I discovered the curious fact that there is absolutely no one among my intimate friends whose name, either Christian or surname, begins with f."

Bridger scratched his head and smiled slightly. Jordan produced the next of

the several letters.

"Now cast your eyes on this one, Dick."

The indifference seemed to be leaving the detective as he bent over the second envelope.

"Same address—same handwriting and the same two x's in the corner as well. Mailed a day or two later, somewhere in Illinois."

"Read it!"

"Splendid to-day. Twelve thousand, and might have been more. Even better than I expected, Smooth as butter. Move again to-night.

"Well, 'F' seems to be pretty well satisfied and making money fast, doesn't he?"

"So it appears to me. Try the next." Again Bridger looked curiously at the double-x mark, and this time his fingers brought forth the sheet with real animation.

"Seven thousand-then nine thousand-and four thousand this morning! Simply wonderful! Keep tabs and check off when the time comes. Remember this.

Bridger looked up with a laugh.

"'F's going to be a millionaire before he quits!"

"Looks that way. Have another,

The fourth letter was from a town in Ohio, and did not seem quite so op-

"Only three thousand, and mighty risky at that. Was almost afraid. Better luck to-morrow.

"Oh, I don't think three thousand was so very bad!" Bridger remarked. "Have you any more, Tom?"

"Only one, which came last evening. This was the one that made me resolve

to show you the things, Dick."

" Let's have it, then."

"Twenty-one thousand, J.! It was like taking candy from a child! Never expected so much sheer luck when we started in, did you? Looks easier every blessed day!

"Yes, it certainly does look easy!" the detective commented dryly. "Well, any more?"

"That's all, Dick. What do you make of them?"

"What do you make of them?"

"I don't know. There-well, there

seems to be only one hypothesis: Somebody or other is engaged on some sort of business deal which keeps him traveling, and he appears to be eminently successful. I figure that he has made about fifty-seven thousand dollars in some two weeks."

"That seems to be about the only construction we can put upon it. Jiminy! I wish he'd let us in on the ground

floor!"

"Same here!" Jordan responded laconically. "However, that isn't exactly the point. Why the deuce is he reporting his successes to me?"

"And why does he put a double x in the corner of each of his envelopes,

my boy?"

"That's the other problem. Why is

"Tommy," said Bridger, "I don't know!"

"And you're not going to make any effort to study it out?" asked Jordan, with a trace of disappointment in his voice.

Bridger laughed.

"I'll try, Tommy, but I must say that I can't see any particular line of work except to assume the fact that the fellow 'F,' whoever he may be, has made a mistake."

"'Harmon P. Jordan'!" quoted the

doctor.

"That's true—and every letter is in place, too," replied Bridger. "There docsn't seem to have been any error in the name, does there?"

"Not a sign of one—and the street and number are perfectly correct as

well."

"Aha!" Bridger stared at the table.

"Well, then, about all we can do is to settle upon the identity of 'F.' You say that you know nobody of that initial?"

" No."

"Think hard, Tom."

"I have been thinking hard—as hard as ever I could. It's no use. I haven't a friend whose name begins with f."

"How about business connections,

then?"

"Haven't any."

"You never dabbled in stocks or anything of that sort?"

"Never in my life. Why?"

"I had thought that there was a bare

possibility that this might be some chap with whom you had done business, and that in this deal, whatever it may be, he had tangled you up with somebody or other for whom he is acting at the present time."

"A man who appears to be capable of taking in several thousand daily would hardly be so utterly absent-minded."

"Very true that. Um—well, there is, of course, a faint chance that this might be a salesman whose orders—— Bosh, no! That would never jibe either, would it?"

" No."

Bridger frowned in perplexity.

"Here's another idea, Tom. Have you—have you ever had a patient whose name began with f—some one whose mind was affected?"

"Not that I recall. Why?"

"Because the hallucination of great wealth isn't so very uncommon, and this might easily enough be some poor mortal you have treated in the past and who believes that he is making a fortune for you now."

After a moment of consideration, Jor-

dan's head shook slowly.

"No—no use. I've had such people to do with in the hospitals, but I have never had a patient with that particular affliction, Dick. Try again."

The detective regarded him quizzically.

"Try again, eh? What do you take me for—a sort of inspired maker of theories? Detective work isn't guesswork, Tom. One has to have some sort of foundation for any structure."

"Nevertheless, can't you make an-

other guess at-"

"No! Here somebody signing himself 'F' takes it into his head to mail you a series of letters from various parts of the country. He speaks about things going beautifully, and mentions thousands very glibly. You certainly know more about your acquaintances and affairs than I do, and yet you haven't the vestige of an idea as to who 'F' is and what he's talking about. How the dickens can you expect me to hand you out the answer?"

"But you told me once upon a time that all mysteries were capable of being figured out, my boy."

"So they are, if you've got anything

to figure on. We haven't here, at the present moment. That all of the story? Nothing more in the line of peculiar things has been happening?"

"No—except—"
Jordan broke off.
"Well, except what?"

"Dick, this morning, when I went out, I believed that a man on the corner

followed me.'

Bridger leaned back and roared until the club waiters stared almost in

horror.

"You'll do, Tom! By Jove, you'll do! If that isn't the regular gag, I never heard it—the mysterious man lurking on the corner and dogging your footsteps about town. Why the deuce is it that when the average mortal stumbles across something odd somebody immediately takes to shadowing him precisely after the fashion of the stage detective?"

"It—it may have been a mistake on my part," said Jordan, a little confus-

edly.

"Well, I guess it was, old man." Bridger gathered the letters together and his face smoothed out. "Seriously, Tom, I'm downright curious about these things, although there may be absolutely nothing behind them. But just now we have nothing whatever to work on. We'll have to wait—well, until 'F' becomes a bit more explicit."

"But if we don't hear anything

"We'll forget it, and nobody will be much the loser."

Jordan pocketed the letters, and for the time the subject was dropped.

Yet Bridger, idling his time between Craftsburg's beauty-spots and the quiet nooks of the surrounding country, could not quite forget the affair. There was something distinctly curious about the correspondence of the itinerant "F."

Each of his letters bore a different postmark. That was a little queer in itself, for Bridger could not conjure up a line of business that would exactly fit the case. And if it were legitimate business, why were the letters not addressed to some one in the business world to whom they belonged—and not to Dr. Jordan?

More than once the notion came to

him that this was some little private joke of Jordan's, but there, too, a flaw appeared. Even had Jordan cared to undertake a joke so elaborate on his old friend, there would not have been time to put it into operation, for the postmark of the first letter antedated Bridger's note regarding his trip by some three or four days.

No, the letters were genuine enough,

but-what did they mean?

Two days later, he called at Jordan's in the late afternoon, and his countenance showed no very happy mood.

"Well, vacation's off, Tom!" he an-

nounced.

"Eh? Why?"

"Oh, I have just had a wire from Corliss, who's running the detective agency in my absence. He's in some sort of tangle with that Camberwell case, and he wants me there for a day or two—hang him!"

"When are you going?"

"To-morrow-ten-twenty train."

" Bah!"

Bridger stared.

"Well, what the deuce are you worrying about?"

"I hoped that you were going to be

here!"

"But why?"

The doctor reached forward and drew a letter from his desk. Bridger's eye caught the familiar double-x mark in the corner, and he stepped forward eagerly.

"Another one, eh?"

"Another one—and just read it!"
The detective quickly spread the sheet upon his knee.

"My DEAR J.: Have more than I can carry. Met an old friend—his name is Candee—yesterday, and gave him the job of bringing them to you. He will be in Craftsburg Wednesday morning, early. Told him to meet you at the corner of Fourth and Renwyck Streets at half past nine, sharp. If you can fix it, be there. If not, write him to Gen'l Delivery and make an appointment. His initials are B. D. Inasmuch as you have never met, I told him that you would wear one black glove and carry the other in the same hand. He will deliver the goods, and you hold them until I write instructions. F."

"'He will deliver the goods'!"
Bridger repeated. "What goods?"

"Tust so!"

"So you wished me to go with you

and see the fun?"

"I wanted you to go alone. I have an operation at ten, sharp, and I will have to be on hand half an hour in ad-

"Then your idea was to have me undertake the job of keeping the appoint-

ment?"

" Precisely."

"Um-yes." Bridger studied the letter. "Fourth and Renwyck Streets is four blocks above here—the depot's three blocks. If this thing is genuine, and the man does appear on time and really hands over something or other to me which isn't readily portable, I shall have to race back, drop it here, and run like sin to make that train. I do the work and you gloat over-oh, a possible package of greenbacks, we'll say-in peace and quiet."

Jordan laughed a little.

"Look here, Dick, you're coming back, aren't you?"

"Friday, I hope."

"Then we'll do this. You keep the appointment. If you do meet any one, and he does give you something, leave it here as you go. Whatever it is, I'll give you my word of honor not to touch it. When you come back, we'll open it together. How's that?"

"Fair enough," said Bridger. do it!"

He folded the letter and placed it in his pocket; and after an hour of fruitless and, on Bridger's part, more or less humorous speculation they adjourned once more to the Union Club for dinner, the subject dropped until the morrow.

At half past nine Bridger stood at the intersection of the streets, and reflected upon the idiocy of a man who could spend one dollar for a pair of black gloves to be used on such a mission.

He procured them, however, and in one black-clad hand he held the odd

glove.

The half-hour had gone by and no one had sought to accost him. Five minutes passed, and ten; then the clock showed the last quarter-hour, and Bridger made remarks under his breath. had all been some silly kind of joke!

Now he would have a quick walk for

his train and a pair of black gloves to serve as a warning against future follies. He turned away-and at the very moment a short man turned out of Renwyck Street and walked straight toward him!

Bridger quickly concealed the start and smiled meaningly as he raised the gloved hand. The other stopped before him and nodded slightly.

" Candee?"

"Yep. I'm from Fennell."

"All right. Got the goods?"

· "Sure thing, old man!" chuckled the stranger. "Great graft, ain't it?"

"The greatest ever!"

"Well, Fennell told me not to dally around. Here. There ain't any use of our being seen together. So long."

He passed Bridger a flat package and turned away abruptly. The detective took his cue and shoved the bundle unconcernedly under his arm. The stranger paused for an instant.

"Oh, say!" he remarked in an undertone. "I'm going to meet Fennell 'long about Monday, down in Pennsylvania. I'll be back Monday night, most

likely. I guess he'll write you."

He sauntered away, and Bridger was almost tempted to put over his departure and follow behind. But the Camberwell case was pressing, and Corliss seemed to be in no end of difficulties. He would have to make the ten-twenty. Reluctantly, he hurried toward Jordan's

What could be in the 'package? It was solid enough, but not very heavy. Its dimensions were perhaps a foot each way, and its depth three or four inches. The detective poked at the brown wrapping-paper as he hurried along, but he could learn nothing.

At the doctor's house he was startled to learn that his watch had run slow by several minutes. He pushed quickly past the girl, laid the package on Jordan's desk, with a scribbled note on one of his cards, and broke for the depot on a dead run.

The difficulties of Corliss in the Camberwell case seemed to have been pretty well justified. Monday noon had arrived before Bridger next put in an appearance in Craftsburg.

To tell the truth, he had hardly for-

gotten that flat package for a moment. and his curiosity amounted to a positive vearning. He dropped his valise at the hotel, and made for Jordan's house.

The doctor was at home, and he re-

garded Bridger quizzically.

"Thought you'd passed away, Dick." "Well, did you open it?" the detective inquired abruptly.

"Did I give you my word not to?"

"You did, but human nature is frail,

"Well, it would have made no difference, anyway, my boy."
"Why not?"

Jordan hesitated for a moment. "Dick, you left that package here a little after tea, didn't you—a flat affair about a foot square?"

" Certainly."

"I laid it away in the desk, and left the desk open. That evening, while I had gone to see a patient, some one broke into this room and removed it."

" What!"

"The house was deserted," said Jordan quietly. "The maids were away, and my wife is out of town. The back window, here, was open when I returned, and absolutely nothing else had been disturbed. The package was gone—that's all!"

"Well, I'll-be hanged!" muttered the detective. "That's downright odd, that is, Tom! I-humph!"

"And that isn't quite all. Our friend 'F,' too, has sent in word again!"

"The deuce he has! Let's see his latest."

The next moment he was poring over the latest communication. This time, the letter hailed from Pennsylvania; the address was correct, as ever, and the mysterious XX still marked the corner of the envelope.

"Candee's going back Monday night. He will meet you same place and time Tuesday morning. Biggest haul ever. I'm going to quit now. Have to, as I'll explain. One more trial might smash everything. See you soon. Keep the goods dark.

"So he is coming again to-morrow morning!" cried Bridger.

"And you'll meet him?"

"You'd better believe that I will!"

"Dick," said the doctor, after a little pause, "what on earth do you make of it all?"

"I don't make anything in particular of it just now, except that we had our hands on something that can't belong to us, and which somebody else desires very much. What the deuce could have been in that package, anyway?"

"And who stole it, without touching

anything else? And by the way!"

Eh?"

"It wasn't imagination," said Jordan sturdily; "I have been followed for days, Dick!"

A slow grin came over Bridger's face. "Well, I'm blessed if it isn't possible after this, Tom."

With the data in hand, discussion of the problem of the XX letters was quite as fruitless as before. They had had the clue in their possession, and through their thoughtless agreement had lost it

One could hardly have foreseen that the flat bundle would have been made the subject of a burglary, but it was

gone nevertheless.

However, morning promised to bring, perhaps, a duplicate of the peculiar package, and Bridger was at his post early.

Even he himself had a strong suspicion that he was being shadowed, yet even his trained faculties could not catch the man who was working behind.

The appointed hour came, and with it the man called Candee. His package was about the same in every particular, and he carried it tightly under one arm. but his eyes were very furtive.

"Here, old man," he muttered.

"Cheese it!"

He was gone—and Bridger held a

replica of the stolen bundle!

The detective fairly burned with an overwhelming curiosity. He very nearly ran the three blocks back to Jordan's, and when he appeared in the corridor with the bundle in sight the good doctor hurriedly disposed of a patient and called out to him.

The office door was closed, and with eager fingers the two men picked at the heavy twine. Thick paper came away and revealed an inner package sealed with wax. They ripped it apart.

Before them lay a sea of postage-

There were sheets of a hundred fivecent stamps—there were sheets of a hundred ten-cent stamps—there were sheets of one hundred two-cent stamps! Not dozens of sheets, but literally hundreds upon hundreds of them, packed tightly, and representing thousands of dollars.

"Tom," said Bridger slowly, when the first amazement had passed, "you've been mistaken for a United States post-

office-that is all."

" But-but-"

"Or else-some one is making or stealing postage-stamps by the million! By jiminy! There is something in this, after all!"

He stared at the array for a minute or two; then he ran quickly and methodically through the pile.

"Three thousand seven hundred dollars' worth here!" he announced.

Whereafter he walked slowly to the doctor's armchair and sat smoking silently, and Jordan forbore to interrupt his meditations.

"Why," said Bridger presently-"why were those letters marked XX?" Jordan shook his head. Another long

pause followed.

"Fennell — Fennell — Fennell — Fennell!" muttered Bridger.

For six or seven minutes the clock ticked loudly. Then Bridger suddenly sat up.

" Tom, how long has that servant-girl

been with you?"

"Eh? What? Why, about years."

"Good! Have her up here, vou?"

Jordan, wondering, touched the bell, and an instant later the maid appeared.

"Look here, my girl," said Bridger sharply, "you know the man who delivers mail on this route?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Would I be right in guessing that a new man has been put on within the past four weeks-eh?"

" Yes, sir.

The detective's face began to shine.

"The man who was on the route before that had been here a long time?"

"He was at this house every day for four years, at every delivery."

"Good! Know his name?"

"It was Johnson, sir."

"Better yet!" cried Bridger. "Do you happen to know where he is now?"

"Yes, sir, he's in the hospital. He has been there for more than three weeks. with typhoid fever."

"That's all."

When the door had closed behind the girl the detective jumped from his chair and dealt the doctor a resounding slap on the back.

"Got it cinched, I verily believe!"

"But what-what-"

"Never you mind what!" laughed Bridger jubilantly. "But if I'm not back here within two hours, with the solution down in writing-well, I miss my guess!"

Jordan stared hard—and Bridger was

He had learned the ins and outs of Craftsburg with fair thoroughness during his incognito vacation, and within a very few minutes he was seated in the car that would land him at the corner of the General Hospital.

The maid's eyes were white and excited as she opened the door to the de-

"Why, sir—the doctor's—the doctor's arrested!" she whispered.

"Is he?" said Bridger casually. "They haven't taken him away?"

"No, sir. They've been waiting in there—this last hour or more," she continued breathlessly.

"That's all right, then. They're waiting for me. I'm next in line to be ar-

rested."

He walked straight into the office. smiling. Jordan, puzzled and frowning. sat toward the corner of the room. At either side a wary man in citizen's raiment was perched upon a chair.

At his entrance one of them arose quickly and walked toward him, a folded

paper in hand.

"Richard Standish," he said, "I have a warrant for your arrest, on the charge of complicity in recent thefts from postoffices all over the country! Your companion here is also under arrest."

"Really?" said the detective; "but

"There is no necessity of your talking now," the secret service man cautioned. "It may interest you to know that we have also arrested the man Fennell in Pennsylvania and that the man calling himself Candee has probably been arrested down-town before this."

Bridger seated himself easily.

"It does interest me—very much indeed," he smiled. "It interests me more, because if it hadn't been for myself I hardly believe you would have gathered in one of the gang. And by the way, my name isn't Standish," he added. "It's Richard Standish Bridger, and I'm supposed to be a private detective in New York. Ever hear of me?"

"I have heard the name, but---" A

slight smile ended the sentence.

"Then look at the badge," laughed Bridger. "Later on I'll satisfy you in any other way you like. For the moment, just listen."

He sketched the story rapidly, and Jordan, at his suggestion, produced the letters and handed them over to the oth-

ers for inspection.

"And it was only after one of you gentlemen stole the first lot of stamps for evidence—you did, didn't you? Ah, yes, I thought so—that I began to attach much importance to the matter. After I saw the stamps I began to get an inkling of what was under way, and why my friend, the doctor, here, had been followed about town.

"Thereupon I began to think hard, and after interviewing the doctor's maid I hit upon what has happened to be the

right idea.

"First of all, I recalled that name of Fennell. It seems to me that I assisted some of you people in looking up the gentleman. He is a post-office inspector, is he not, and he has been suspected of some crooked work lately?"

"He was to have been dismissed this week," one of the secret service men put

in.

"Exactly. Well, the name struck a familiar chord, at any rate. It occurred to me as just possible that he might be traveling about the various offices, on the strength of his official connection, stealing postage-stamps and sending them on here to some one else in the department for disposal.

"Then I began to figure on this XX business. Why was it not supposable that Fennell was in league with one of the letter-carriers here? Why could it not be that he was sending his letters so that they would fall to this particular man's route and he could pick them out, by reason of the XX marking?

"That is just what happened, gentlemen! Fennell was working with Henry Johnson, who has been delivering mail along this street every day for four years. He's a poor devil with a family, no money to speak of, and no end of trouble. Fennell picked him out as a good coworker, and after a while Johnson, in his desperation, fell in with the scheme, for it offered him a share of several thousand dollars.

"He dared not have Fennell write to his home. Therefore, they picked out Dr. Jordan's name and number—just as they might have picked out John Jones's, three doors below—and they agreed upon the marking. When a letter came along for the doctor with a distinct XX in the upper left-hand corner, that was Johnson's. He was to pick them out and pocket them, and thus he would get his advices from Fennell in perfect safety.

"But just after Fennell had started to work the unexpected hitch came—all unknown to him. Johnson fell sick and was taken to the hospital, with typhoid fever, and there he has been ever since. Another man was put on the route, and, of course, the letters were delivered directly to Dr. Jordan. Johnson dared say nothing about it, and he has been shaking with more than chills down there in the hospital."

Bridger paused and smiled.

"There's your story," he concluded. "Incidentally, may I ask just how you people learned that Jordan, here, was receiving the letters and was mixed up in the business?"

"That's a little curious, too," laughed the government detective. "It happened that the robberies were discussed in the Craftsburg post-office, and this new carrier overheard the discussion and chanced to remember the places and the dates. He had already remarked the two x's on the letters, and when two or three more had arrived he suddenly observed

the fact that the postmarks corresponded with the thefts as they occurred. He notified the postmaster, and we were sent here."

"But, Bridger," said Jordan curiously, "you seem to have managed a pretty

complete story?"

"I did," said the detective. "I went down to that hospital, and in the pres-

ence of your assistant district attorney and the coroner I persuaded this man Johnson to make a true ante-mortem statement. Here's a sworn copy of it."

He passed the document to the secret service man and smiled again.

"Well, gentlemen, are we still under arrest—or are you going to commend me for the chief's job in your bureau?"

# FOUNDED ON FICTION.

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS.

In which is set forth the startling fashion in which two budding authors received help from an unexpected quarter.

I HAD reached the age of thirty, and had a bank-account of twenty-seven dollars and a half.

I earned my daily bread, when I had any, as a story-writer. I wrote for anybody who had money enough and was sufficiently lacking in common sense to buy my stories.

I found very few of these, which fact may have something to do with the

amount of my bank-account.

There was another peculiar fact associated with my attainment of thirty years. I was in love.

No amount of personally conducted introduction could explain the depth of love I felt for Miss Almanina Vazzar. I had never known a young woman whose artistic spirit appealed so keenly to my own.

And Almanina, while only twentynine, had a bank-account of twentyseven dollars and a half, showing that she had begun to save something one year before I had.

Another peculiar bond between us was that Almanina earned her cake and icecream soda, when I didn't buy them, by writing stories.

This will sufficiently explain the situation so, far as introductions are concerned.

Almanina lived on a farm, on what is well known as the Paris Hill Road. This is a country road leading out of Utica up over the hills and down into the valleys till it reaches the village, or hamlet, of Paris Hill.

"You see," said Almanina, with a sigh, one afternoon as she sat in an easy chair on the porch and looked over a rejected manuscript, while I lolled in a hammock glancing over a story that had been declined with so many thanks that it was moth-eaten—"you see, we shall never be able to marry. It is always the same. We can't seem to make an editor realize our worth."

"That's so," I assented with a sigh.

Almanina's mother was making biscuits, and I smelled them. Almanina's father was coming up the path with an armful of fresh sweet corn for supper.

"You see," said Almanina again, "if you were only a farmer. Or if you did the writing and I worked in a mill and earned something. Then we could think of it."

"But, then, you couldn't work in a mill, and I don't know anything about a farm," I replied.

"I know," said Almanina wearily, "but it's just the same with stories."

Almanina's father came up the stoop. "What's them red stamps on the envelope?" he asked.

"Postage due," said Almanina. "I don't send stamps any more."

"Don't want 'em back, eh?"

"Oh, I don't care. It costs too much."

" Heh."

Almanina's father strode into the house with his armful of corn.

I felt sorry for this hard-working man. He owned a nice farm, many head of cattle and sheep, and was reputed to be worth about fifty thousand dollars. Through some oversight on his part, he had never told me his exact financial standing.

But I felt sorry for him. I had life so easy. But, then, we can't all be

authors. We need farmers.

The heavy tread of Almanina's father sounded again, and he came out on the porch. He had his trousers stuffed in the tops of his cowhide boots, bought on Exchange Place, in New Hartford, and paid for. I had on patent leathers. which were wearing out, and were not paid for.

Almanina's father looked up and down the road. His fences were in He poked his head good condition. around the corner of the house and viewed his broad fields. Then he looked

at me.

"There's something wrong, grand," he said, as he drowned a horsefly with tobacco-juice—"there is certainly something wrong. Now, you and Almanina have had good educations. You ought to write good stories."

"We do," declared Almanina.

"But nobody wants 'em. Seems to me that you don't get down to nature. Now, take me. If I want to sell corn. I've got to sell good corn. If Silas Jossing has better corn than I, he sells his and I don't. Now, to raise good corn to sell, I've got to get down to nature."

"Oh, pa!" said Almanina. "What are you driving at? Get down to nature? Plow, harrow, fertilize?

has that to do with literature?"

'Everything. It's the whole business. Now, I see you two sittin' out under them apple-trees writin' about knights and ladies, and wars and crowns and things. What do you know about 'em? Here's Si Jossing. He reads. He takes the New York Poultry Journal, and the Oneida County Farmer's Home, and reads 'em. But would he read them stories about a knight with a spear, and a coal-scuttle on his head? Naw. Give 'em a real live story of something they understand."

"Ah, I see," I ventured to remark. "Your father means get down to the level of the people you want to reach."

"But I would like to lift them to our level," said Almanina.

"That's too long a reach," explained her father. "Now, here is a whole county that reads, and nobody knows the story of the haunted chapel."

"The what?" gasped Almanina, sit-

ting up straight.

"See? I thought so. Well, you know where the old Chenango Canal used to be-nothing but a creek and a country road now-well, there was a man once who thought he could do good by building a little chapel over near the canal, where it runs into the woods. He built a little stone chapel and preached there. It was the greatest congregation anybody ever saw. Canalers, Oneida Indians on the way to the fair at Utica, hop-pickers—everybody went to hear old Krily preach."
"Well," I said, "I don't see any

story in it."

"Don't, eh? Well, when you were about two years younger than nothing Krily was killed. Yes, sir. murdered in the church he built."

"Who did it?" asked Almanina

breathlessly.

Almanina's father looked up and down the road again.

" I did."

"You!" cried Almanina in horror. "You murdered a preacher of God's word?"

"Yep."

"Oh, Heavens! To think I have a father for a murderer—I mean a murderer for a father!"

Almanina was staring at the placid old gentleman, who seemed about as vicious as a canary-bird.

· "Does mother know?" whispered

Almanina.

"Oh, yes," he replied nonchalantly. "She helped."

"Helped kill a man?"

Almanina was in tears.

"She held him while I sawed his head off. I---"

" Horrors! Don't tell any more. Were you arrested?"

"Well, I was, but I got out, all right.

I bribed the jury."

Heaven!" I exclaimed. "What sort of man are you to tell this with such ease?"

"I'm some, when I get a-goin'," he answered. "I had to do it. He was in love with your mother, and I simply had to do it."

The expression on Almanina's face was indescribable.

"Where is that church?" she cried.

"Oh, it's over there in the woods—what's left of it."

"And you killed Krily?"

"Sawed him up. Know that lock alongside where Nail Creek goes under the old viaduct?"

"Yes-what the boys call the swim-

ming-hole?"

"Same. We threw him in there."

"Oh! And you tell of it? I should think—I should think—"

"Well, ma cried some, but that didn't matter. He was dead, and we had to do something with him."

"Did you—saw—cut him up—alive?" I asked, beginning to feel a tremendous

hatred for the man.

"Oh, yes. Sawed right through."

Almanina was gasping. Her breath came fast and short. Her eyes were staring. She groped for the manuscript that had been turned down.

She looked at it. I looked at mine. What a miserably weak thing it was! Here was something worth while.

"And the chapel—you say it is haunted!" said Almanina.

"Yes. There ain't been a night since I killed him his figure ain't been seen looking for his head."

" His-looking-"

"Sure. I cut his head off with the saw. You see, ma had that, and dropped it into Nail Creek. The rest of him went into the lock. Now, you see, the ghost wants his head."

"And you've seen it?"

"I ain't seen it. Si Jossing has seen

it every time it has appeared."

I was cold. Almanina was shivering. Her lips trembled, and there was a fervid glow in her eyes that seemed almost like hysteria.

I was fumbling with a pencil.

"Write down what he says," gasped Almanina. "We mustn't use the right names. But what a story! I know the Knockemout Magazine will take it."

"Don't furgit," said Almanina's father, "that we tried to set the church

on fire, but it wouldn't burn. Something

"Heavens!"

It was creepy. Almanina's mother came to the door and looked out. Almanina turned away from her in horror.

"What's the matter, pa?" asked the

old lady. "All well here?"

"Well," said Almanina's father, "I was tellin' about that time you and me sawed up that preacher and threw him in the lock and you lost his head in Nail Creek."

"Oh!" she said quietly. "Is that

all?"

Almanina was ghastly white. I felt it, and supposed I looked it, too.

Almanina sank into her chair and began to write. I walked up and down the lawn and thought things out.

"A family tragedy that has never been equaled," I said. "We will do

it together."

We went at it. Our hot breath mingled. I could almost hear Almanina's heart beat. I know I could feel mine, all right.

"The saw—let me see—ma!" called

Almanina's father.

Almanina's mother came to the door again.

"What ever became of the saw we cut up that preacher fellow with?"

"Oh, it's around somewhere. Got rust on it. Blood, I guess."

Almanina did not look up. In a frenzy of horror, she was writing as fast as possible.

We worked all night. We wanted to hear no more. Our souls had been stirred, and our blood was fevered. We wrote as though it were our last night on earth.

In the morning I took it to a young fellow I knew who was one of the editors of a Utica paper. He looked it over and stared at me. '

"Did you take morphine to write this?" he asked. "What sort of dope?"

"Can you use it?"

"I'll see what the boss says. What the—where is this church, chapel, or whatever it is?"

"Up in the woods, by the old Chenango Canal."

"M! I'll let you know this after-

That day was the most feverish day I ever spent. Almanina's father hoed potatoes as though he had never committed an atrocious murder.

"What did you call that story?" he

asked me.

"' The Haunted Chapel."

There was a click in his mouth and he

went on hoeing.

I received a check for fifty dollars that afternoon, and hastened as quickly as the trolley would carry me to tell Almanina the good news.

"Just think of it!" she said. "And

my own father's crime!"

"Let's go see that church," I said.

"It can't be far."

Almanina's father had gone to New Hartford to get a piece of new harness. Her mother was visiting Si Jossing's

wife, up the hill.

We went. We found the old lock, the levels that were filled in, the bit of creek that was left to feed the few mills along its route to the city, and we found, besides, plenty of woods and shrubbery.

We saw no church, no remains of a church, no ruins. We returned to the

farm.

"Pa," said Almanina, "we can't find that chapel."

"Well, s'long as you've got your money," he said, "I'll tell you. There ain't none."

"No-no chapel?"

"No. Nobody ever tried to preach to canalers in those days on the Chenang."

"And—Krily—the preacher?"
"Never heard of such a man."

"But that awful story—how you killed him—how you and ma sawed him

up-and-the rest?"

"I'll tell you. Ma and I had a talk. Just as I told you, when you want good corn you've got to plow and harrow and fertilize. You two lolled around here all summer making love and writin' a lot of stuff nobody understood. I was doin' the plowin' and the harrowin', and your mother helped. Now, you see what I meant. You've got to live a story in your mind to make it good. Yes, that was a good yarn. 'Haunted Chapel'? But, then, you've earned fifty dollars. That's worth a yarn. I'll tell you another some day."

And with a grin at Almanina's mother he sat down to supper and helped him-

self to bread.

# MUTUAL FLAMES.

BY TOM WORTH.

A coincidence that was accommodating to more than the chief person concerned.

"TSN'T that curtain on fire?"

"It certainly looks so to me," I answered the little rotund personality who had thus accosted me.

Though we had never seen each other before, we were drawn together by the excitement of the moment.

From our position across the street from the house he had indicated, we could see that the blaze was making alltoo-rapid headway.

Together and in the usual excitement of such moments, we rushed across, bent upon alarm. The house door stood open, for it was summer in the village and the time just nightfall.

"This is surely luck!" my companion

of the moment gloated.

I thought he referred to our timely

discovery of the fire. I modified this conclusion later.

Without ceremony we rushed into the house and he led the way up the short and easy flight of stairs to the room above where we had seen the blaze. We encountered nobody.

The short and corpulent fellow proved himself possessed of remarkable agility, for at a bound he cleared the breadth of the apartment, tore the offending drapery from its fastenings, and with a hasty reach for the water pitcher which stood handy, soon reduced the flaming fabric to a charred and water-soaked pulp.

My part was passive, and consisted of a review of the room and its appurtenances.

No question about it: we had stumbled upon "my lady's" boudoir. atmosphere of feminine refinement was most manifest, to say nothing of certain articles of apparel of which I will say

"Well, it's out!" exclaimed the little

fellow.

I don't know whether he referred to the fire or whether he meant to indicate his next move. Certain it is, however,

he lost no time in getting out.

He brushed by me, thumped his way down-stairs with remarkable celerity, and I could even hear the trot he assumed as he made off into the stillness of the fast-closing night.

And then I caught the swish of a skirt. I trust that's the proper term. Anyway,

I believe I've read it somewhere.

She appeared from an adjoining room the door to which had been latch-to.

I attempt no portraiture. Imagine your own ideal; transfer your view-point to mine. You have her.

Nor were her charms lessened by the flush as she caught sight of me, the charred curtain, all.

I explained.

"It was those curling irons." She went to the cause of things with acu-

Then she turned and thanked me. Truth compelled me to tell of the little fat man's share, and, the next moment, I was mighty glad I had. For she had turned toward her dresser.

A little "oh!" of mingled surprise

and alarm escaped her.

"May I ask the trouble?" I ventured.

" It's gone!"

"What, mademoiselle?" I'm really French, but I look the part.

"The ring," she vouchsafed.

And then I thought I began to see a little clearer into the fat little gentleman's character.

Upon conference I was delighted to see that she agreed with me, for she could well have painted me with the same stick.

"I'm no exponent of deductive investigation, but I assure you I'll do my best. I'll certainly know him again. I'm your detective from this moment."

"Thank you," she said simply, and added with something akin to a stammer: "You see, it isn't the value of the stone; it's the peculiar circumstances; rather a personal matter, you know."

I thought I understood, though it certainly did dishearten me to do so. I don't care who knows it; I fell in love with her the minute she had glinted those heavy-fringed orbs my way.

And so I left her and started my

search.

No, I did not count the number of nails in the heel of the footprint where the fellow had jumped the last four steps from the stoop, and had landed his left hind foot on an eight-day-old newspaper that had lain invitingly beside the mud-scraper, rendered pulp-like by the shower of yesterday.

I did not indulge in any science-of-

deduction tactics.

No, I met him prosaically in the lobby of the hotel, where it appeared we were both stopping.

At first he tried to elude me. Finding

this impossible, he blurted out:

"You see, I had spent two sleepless nights, for, after I had sent her that ring, more and more I began to see she wasn't just my style. In my letter I had given her until to-day to reply. Besides, I really can't afford to marry; fact is, I bought this sparkler on credit, and that worried me some, too."

He looked up to see how I took his

"Do you mean to tell me that that ring was sent by you to Miss-"

"Dorothy Machant," he prompted.

"What will you take for it?" I asked.

"I owe seventy-five on it."

"Hundred and twenty do?"

"You bet!"

I counted out six yellowbacks, for I had just sold a piano. That's my line, vou know.

On the sidewalk I beckoned a surrey driver and gave the address.

She was in. I was discreet in explanation. Finally I exhibited the ring.

"Good!" she cried delightedly. "Now, I can send it back to him in time."

"No, you can't," I answered.

At this new phase I overcame all discretion in my explanations.

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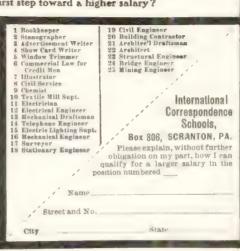
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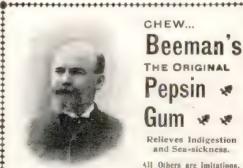
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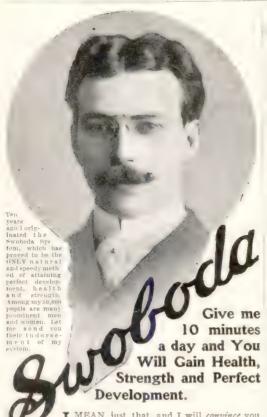
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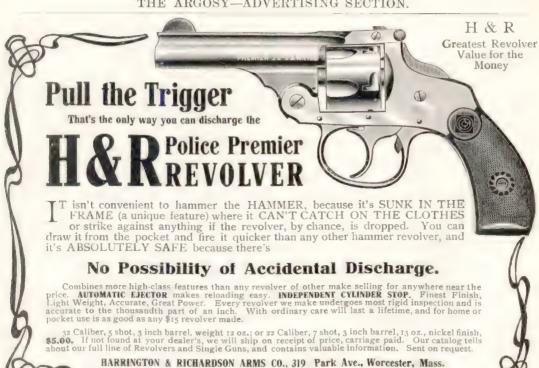
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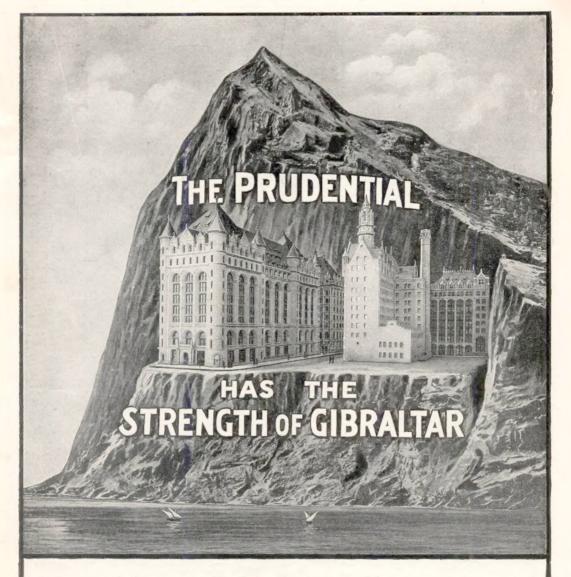
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